GET KITTED OUT

15 t-shirt colours · XS youth to 3XL
Hoodies · Baby grows · Mugs · Pin badges
Request service · Worldwide shipping

www2.cultzeros.co.uk

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: LAST 16 PREVIEW

World Soccer

GLOBAL FOOTBALL SINCE 1960

February 2019

FACE TO FACE

LIONEL MESSI

Barca genius gets technical

CLUB WORLD CUP

REAL MADRID

World champions again!

6 OF THE BEST

ASSIST KINGS

Spotlight on Europe's top providers

Exclusive interview

SADIO MANE

Liverpool star opens up on the title race

PLUS

- SOUTH AMERICAN LEAGUES ROUND-UP
- TURKEY SPOTLIGHT
- MARCELO BIELSA
- LEAGUE OF IRELAND

CLASSIC FOOTBALL SHIRTS

THE WORLD'S LARGEST COLLECTION OF ORIGINAL FOOTBALL SHIRTS

10% OFF WITH DISCOUNT CODE: **WORLD10**

HUGE CLEARANCE RANGE AVAILABLE

£17.99

£34.99

£34.99

£27.99

£17.99

www.classicfootballshirts.co.uk

@classicshirts /classicfootballshirts @classicfootballshirts

WorldSoccer
Global football intelligence since 1960

Contents

February 2019

FEATURES

38 Champions League
Round of 16 preview

24 Eyewitness: Argentina
Libertadores champs ignore Club World Cup setback

28 Eyewitness: Turkey
Minnows make all the running in the Super Lig

THE WORLD THIS MONTH

People in the news...on and off the pitch

4 **In pictures**
10 **From the Editor**
13 **Jim Holden** Messi or Ronaldo?
14 **Keir Radnedge** Asian Cup controversy
16 **Jonathan Wilson** Mourinho's way
18 **Ins & outs** people on the move
20 **Brian Glanville** transfer market mistakes

HEADLINERS

32 **Ally Samatta**
34 **Gonzalo Martinez**
35 **Marcelo Bielsa**
36 **Vinicius Junior**
37 **Gerard Pique**

FACE TO FACE

46 **Sadio Mane**
50 **Lionel Messi**

6 OF THE BEST

54 **Assist kings**

TALENT SCOUT

56 **French defenders**

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL

58 **Skinner heads to USA**

ARCHIVES

60 **February 1973**

RIVALS

82 **East Bengal & Mohun Bagan**

Follow World Soccer online

FOOTBALL 24-7

Follow @worldsoccermag Like World Soccer Magazine

SAVE MONEY ON WorldSoccer
Exclusive subscription offer.
See page 8

World Service

Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents

64 **Club World Cup** Real Madrid win again
68 **South America** league round-ups
71 **Egypt** new African Nations Cup hosts
72 **Kuwait** back in the international game
74 **Sudamericana Cup** new name on trophy
76 **Republic of Ireland** new season preview

PLUS 70 Global diary 78 Results, tables, fixtures 81 ESM XI

In Pictures

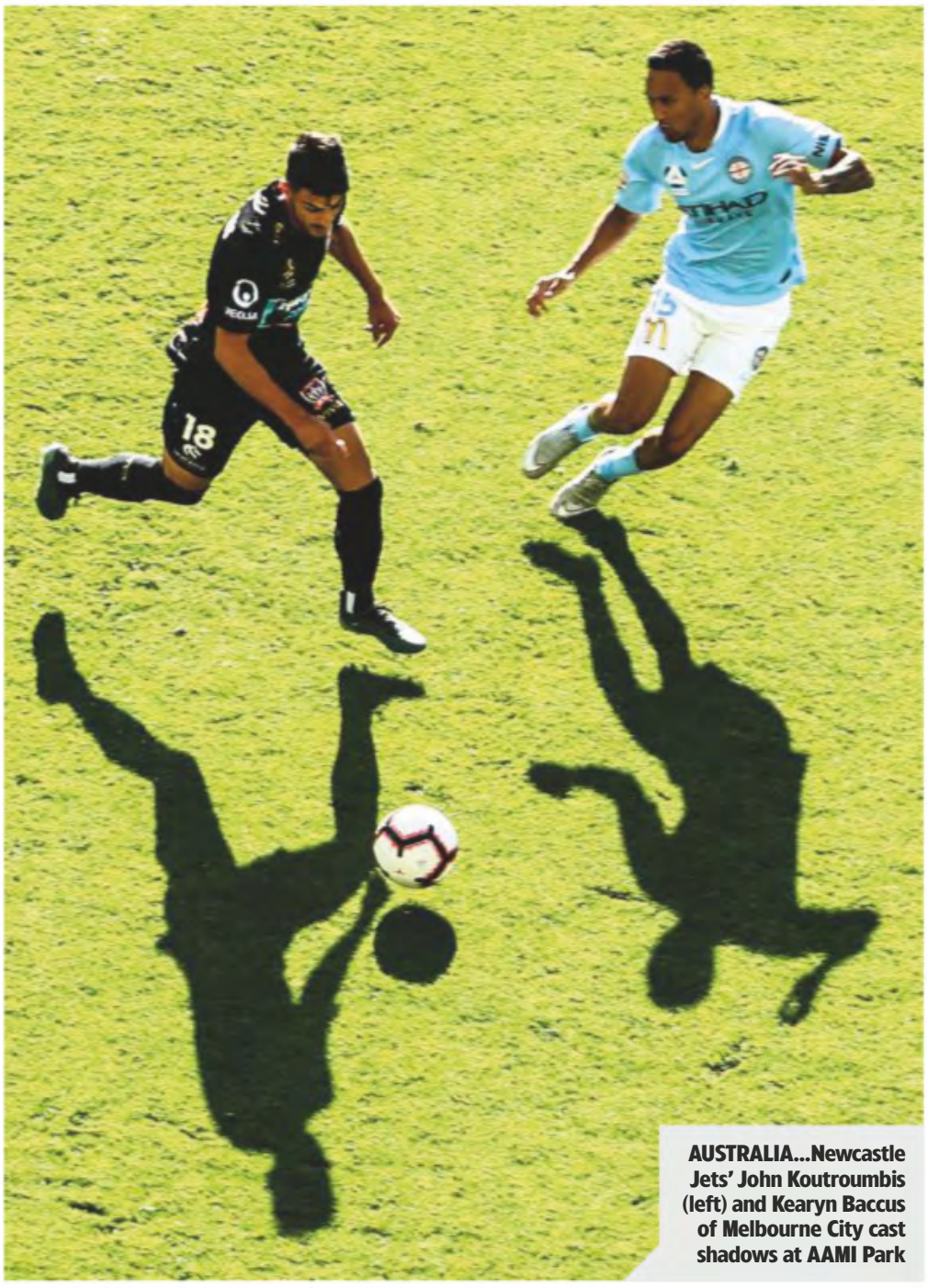
The global game caught on camera

ENGLAND...Chelsea defender David Luiz ends up in the back of the net after missing a chance to score in a home defeat by Leicester City

14

MEXICO...Club America coach Miguel Herrera celebrates winning the Apertura Final against Cruz Azul

UAE...India players defend a Bahrain free-kick taken by Jamal Rashid during the Asian Cup



AUSTRALIA...Newcastle Jets' John Koutroumbis (left) and Kearyn Baccus of Melbourne City cast shadows at AAMI Park

HOLLAND...Fran Sol of Willem II celebrates victory at Emmen with away fans after the game

GERMANY...Timo Werner (left) and Diego Demme of RB Leipzig celebrate a goal against Mainz

BELGIUM... Standard Liege's Christian Luyindama (left) comes face to face with Victor Osimhen of Charleroi during a league encounter

Complete this coupon and send to: **FREEPOST TI Media Limited**
(No further address needed. No stamp required – for UK only)

YES! I would like to subscribe to World Soccer

Please tick your preferred payment method

- ☐ **UK Direct Debit, pay only £23.49 every 6 months, SAVING YOU 31% (full price £34.08)**
- ☐ 1 year Cheque/Credit or Debit Card (13 issues), pay only £50.99, saving 25% (full price £68.15)
- ☐ 2 year Cheque/Credit or Debit Card (26 issues), pay only £94.99, saving 30% (full price £136.30)

YOUR DETAILS:

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms: Forename:

Surname:

Email:

Address:

Postcode:

Home Tel. No: (inc area code)

Mobile:

By submitting your information, you agree to our Privacy Policy available at www. ti-media.com/privacy/. Please keep me up to date with special offers and news from World Soccer and other brands within the TI Media Limited Group by ☐ email, ☐ post, ☐ telephone and/or ☐ SMS. You can unsubscribe at any time.

I WOULD LIKE TO SEND A GIFT TO:

Please also fill out 'Your Details' above. To give more than one subscription, please supply address details on a separate sheet.

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms: Forename:

Surname:

Address:

Postcode:

CHOOSE FROM 3 EASY WAYS TO PAY:

1. **CHEQUE**
I enclose a cheque/postal order made payable to TI Media Limted for: £_____

2. **CREDIT/DEBIT CARD**
Please debit £ _____ from my:
☐ Visa ☐ Visa Debit ☐ Mastercard ☐ Amex
Card No.
Expiry Date
M M - Y Y

Signature: Date:
(I am over 18)

3. Pay only £23.49 every 6 months by Direct Debit (UK only)

Instruction to your bank or building society to pay by Direct Debit.
Name and full postal address of your bank or building society

Name of Bank:

Address of Bank:

Postcode:

Name of Account Holder:

Sort Code: Account No:

Instruction to your Bank or Building Society: Please pay Magazines Direct Direct Debits from the account detailed on this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this instruction may remain with Magazines Direct and if so, details will be passed electronically to my Bank or Building Society.

Signature: Date:
(I am over 18)

☐ **Please keep me up to date with special offers and news just by email from carefully selected companies. Your personal details will not be shared with those companies - we send the emails and you can unsubscribe at any time. Offer closes 28th February 2019.** Offer open to new subscribers only. Direct Debit offer is available to UK subscribers only. £23.49 payable by six monthly Direct Debit. This price is guaranteed for the first 12 months and we will notify you in advance of any price changes. Please allow up to six weeks for delivery of your first subscription issue (up to eight weeks overseas). The full subscription rate is for 12 months (13 issues) and includes postage and packaging. If the magazine ordered changes frequency per annum, we will honour the number of issues paid for, not the term of the subscription. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. †The Rewards scheme is available for all active print subscribers of magazines published by TI Media Limited, free of charge. Full terms and conditions are available at mymagazinerewards.co.uk. Digital subscribers also get access as long as the subscription has been purchased directly through the publishers at magazinesdirect.com. For enquiries please call: +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday - Saturday 8am - 6pm UK Time or e-mail: help@magazinesdirect.com. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.

XWS CODE: 23AG

Enjoy these great subscriber benefits:

- **Never miss an issue with delivery direct to your door**
- **Getting the magazine for less than you'd pay at the newsagent!**
- **Access to exclusive offers, giveaways and prizes with Subscriber Rewards**

0330 333 1113
Quote Code: 23AG
(Monday to Saturday from 8am to 6pm, UK time)
For overseas orders call +44 330 333 1113

TREAT YOURSELF OR A FRIEND THIS YEAR!

Subscribe to World Soccer from only £23.49

SAVE UP TO 31%

Subscribe online at **www.worldsoccersubs.com/23AG**

Complete the coupon opposite

THE DIRECT DEBIT GUARANTEE: This Guarantee is offered by all banks and building societies that accept instructions to pay Direct Debits. If there are any changes to the amount, date or frequency of your Direct Debit, Magazines Direct will notify you 10 working days in advance of your account being debited or as otherwise agreed. If you request Magazines Direct to collect a payment, confirmation of the amount and date will be given to you at the time of the request. If an error is made in the payment of your Direct Debit by Magazines Direct or your bank or building society, you are entitled to a full and immediate refund of the amount paid from your bank or building society. If you receive a refund you are not entitled to, you must pay it back when Magazines Direct asks you to. You can cancel a Direct Debit at any time by simply contacting your bank or building society. Written confirmation may be required. Please also notify us.

FROM THE EDITOR

There's plenty to read about and discuss this month. But I fear we finally have to ask the question: are we playing too much football? Have we reached peak viewing point?

The Champions League resumes with 16 teams in the knockout stage (page 38). Yet you could count the number of entertaining games in this season's group stage on the fingers of one hand. Knockout matches traditionally feature more cautious tactics, yet there is talk of some clubs wanting to shift games to weekends in a bid to increase TV revenues.

> I fear we finally have to ask the question: are we playing too much football? Have we reached peak viewing point?

The recent Club World Cup (page 64) was ignored by much of the footballing world. The old format of the World Club Cup (or Intercontinental Cup) was a more straightforward affair: a one-off match at a neutral venue which at least provided a clear answer as to who was best, Europe or South America? It is hard to see how a proposed expansion of the competition to 24 teams will benefit anybody, with the exception of the bankers backing the new venture.

The downside to the game's globalisation and commercialisation is the current situation in Turkey (page 28) where the biggest clubs have overstretched themselves and the league's best players are being sold.

Gavin Hamilton, Editor

10 SIGNIFICANT EVENTS THIS MONTH

1 Real Madrid win Club World Cup p64
2 Salah voted African Footballer of the Year p10
3 Champions League knockout stage kicks off p38
4 Solskjaer succeeds Mourinho at United p42
5 Gonzalo Martinez wins Americas award p34
6 Messi awarded fifth Golden Shoe p50
7 Unheralded teams enjoy success in Turkey p28
8 Egypt awarded Nations Cup hosting rights p71
9 Athletico Paranaense win Sudamericana Cup p74
10 Genk are surprise leaders in Belgium p32

SENEGAL

Salah is voted African Footballer of the Year

Liverpool and Egypt forward Mohamed Salah was named African Footballer of the Year for the second successive year at the Confederation of African Football's awards ceremony in Dakar.

Salah beat Liverpool team-mate Sadio Mane and Arsenal striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang – the same two players as last year – in a vote decided by the technical directors and head coaches of 56 CAF member associations.

"This award is very big for me," said Salah when collecting the trophy for his 2018 exploits. "I love it because I saw it when I was young and I always had a dream to win it one day.

"I'm proud to win it twice. I must thank my family and my team-mates, and I dedicate this award to my country, Egypt."

"I am proud of the colour of my skin. Proud to be French, Senegalese, Neapolitan"

Napoli defender Kalidou Koulibaly, after being racially abused by Internazionale fans

USA

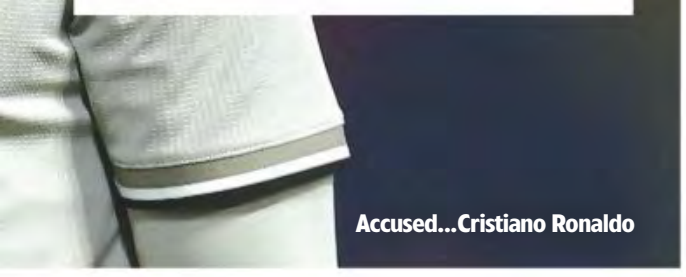
Vegas police seek Ronaldo DNA evidence

Police in Nevada have formally asked Italian authorities to obtain a DNA sample from Cristiano Ronaldo in the investigation of accusations that he raped a woman a decade ago in Las Vegas.

In September 2018, when Kathryn Mayorga sued Ronaldo in Clark County District Court in Nevada, accusing the player of raping her in a Las Vegas hotel penthouse suite in 2009, he paid her $375,000 in hush money.

Mayorga's lawyers said she was now seeking $200,000 in damages and to void the non-disclosure agreement, which they said she was coerced into signing by "personal reputation protection specialists hired" by Ronaldo.

Ronaldo has maintained he is innocent of rape and said through his Las Vegas lawyer that the sexual encounter in question was consensual.



Accused...Cristiano Ronaldo

Proud... Mohamed Salah

HEROES & VILLAINS

JAKUB BLASZCZYKOWSKI

Without a club since leaving Wolfsburg in December, the winger offered to play for former side Wisla Krakow for nothing. The 33-year-old, who was a league champion in his previous spell at Wisla and a Champions League finalist with Borussia Dortmund in 2013, also donated £265,000 to help the financially stricken Polish club.

Help...Blaszczykowski

FABIO QUAGLIARELLA

By scoring in a 2-1 loss at Juventus, Sampdoria's striker found the net for a ninth successive Serie A game – the first player to achieve such a feat since David Trezeguet for Juve in 2005.

Cup hero...Monaco goalkeeper Loic Badiashile

LOIC BADIASHILE

In a shoot-out consisting of 22 penalties, Monaco's goalkeeper saved three spot-kicks before converting the winner as Thierry Henry's side beat Rennes in the French League Cup.

PEPE

Having cut short his contract with Besiktas to reduce the Turkish club's debt, he also covered the wages of several staff members upon his exit and left a cash tip for several of those who had worked alongside him in recent years.

Closed...Inter play Benevento at an empty San Siro

INTERNAZIONALE

The Serie A club were ordered to play two home games behind closed doors as punishment for monkey noises directed by supporters at Napoli's Senegalese defender Kalidou Koulibaly.

WAYNE ROONEY

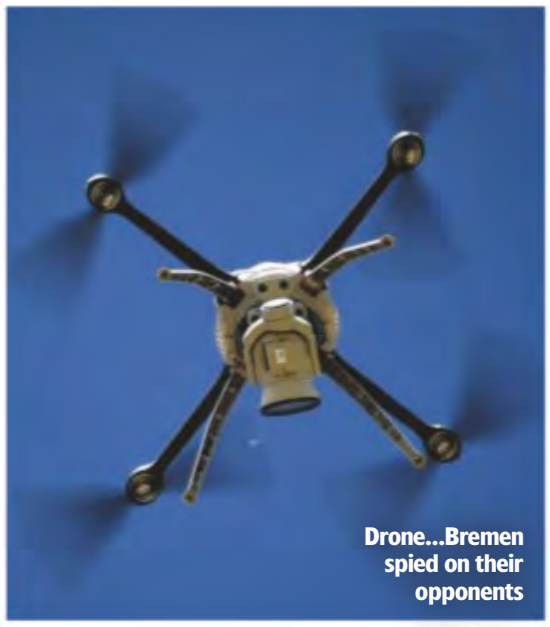
The DC United forward was arrested on a charge of public intoxication on his return to the United States following a one-day trip to Saudi Arabia. Rooney's spokesman claimed he was "disorientated" after mixing alcohol and sleeping tablets on the transatlantic flight.

CHELSEA FANS

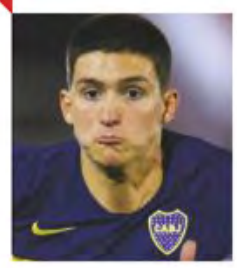
UEFA opened disciplinary proceedings against the London club after reports of anti-semitic chants by supporters during the Europa League tie against Vidi in Hungary.

WERDER BREMEN

The club's general manager Frank Baumann was forced to admit that they used a drone to spy on Bundesliga rivals Hoffenheim in training. The flying of drones over groups of people in Germany is prohibited.



Drone...Bremen spied on their opponents



"I think we ended up making a very good fee for a player, but we wished he'd played in Boca's first team for a while"

Boca Juniors president Daniel Angelici on the sale of Leonardo Balerdi (left) to Borussia Dortmund

Diego LAINEZ (Real Betis)

Real Betis may have lost their opening two La Liga games of the new year, but they won the battle to secure one of the best early signings of the winter transfer window, with the teenage Mexican winger joining from Club America for a fee believed to be in the region of €14million.

The 18-year-old was one of the standout stars of his side's recent Apertura triumph in Mexico, scoring goals in each of the two semi-final legs against Pumas.

"Diego is an exceptional young player and he demonstrates the potential of young Mexican players in any circumstance," Club America wrote in a statement.

He is seen as one of the country's brightest young stars and made his senior international debut in September, in a friendly defeat by Uruguay.

Ajax were reported to be the favourites to sign him but Betis sporting director Lorenzo Serra Ferrer flew to Mexico in order to steer the deal in the direction of the Spanish club.

Duvan ZAPATA (Atalanta)
The Colombian, on loan from Sampdoria, enjoyed a goal-fest in December with a hat-trick against former club Udinese and two goals against Juventus.

Ki-Jana HOEVER (Liverpool)
Dutch defender who, at 16 years and 354 days, became the third-youngest player to appear for Liverpool on his debut at Wolves in the FA Cup.

Marcus THURAM (Guingamp)
The son of French World Cup-winner Lilian scored the winning penalty against Paris Saint-Germain in the League Cup, having earlier missed from the spot.

Leonardo BALERDI (Borussia Dortmund)
The defender left Boca Juniors in an €15m move to the Bundesliga leaders following an injury to Manuel Akanji.

Achraf HAKIMI (Borussia Dortmund)
The right-back, on loan from Real Madrid, was voted best young African player at the CAF awards for his performances this autumn.

Pablo SARABIA (Sevilla)
The midfielder has linked brilliantly with striker Wissam Ben Yedder to prompt talk of transfer interest from former club Real Madrid.

Jim HOLDEN

AT THE HEART OF THE GAME

Ronaldo v Messi: the debate goes on

Thrilling...Cristiano Ronaldo has excelled at Juventus

The insistent and unavoidable question of the past decade, in which we have been blessed to watch two of the all-time greats playing in the same era and often head-to-head, is: which one do you think is the best?

I have always favoured Lionel Messi over Cristiano Ronaldo. Bewitching skill over blinding power has been the main reason, although a milder ego and fewer theatricals have also been a factor. But now I am not so sure. Now I am leaning the other way.

A significant element has been added to the equation – the compelling way that Ronaldo has energised Serie A following his switch to Juventus in the summer after so many years at Real Madrid.

It was a mighty gamble for a 33-year-old with such illustrious success. It is never easy to change clubs, and the intensity of focus and pressure on him in Italy is something to behold. His picture is everywhere in a land where football is a religion that is discussed in cafes over breakfast and with vino at lunch and dinner.

It is never easy to adapt to new team-mates and new tactics; not least at a club whose dreams you shattered only a few months earlier in a controversial Champions League semi-final. But Ronaldo has succeeded brilliantly on the pitch, even while facing major troubles off the field with an accusation of rape, which he vehemently denies.

The ego of CR7 is there, of course, but he has embraced the collective in Turin. If there was a feeling he had become something of a destructive, domineering presence at the Bernabeu, that is certainly not the case in Italy.

He was top scorer in Serie A at the halfway stage of the season with 14 goals, breaking a club record set more than 60 years ago by John Charles, and there are new landmarks galore in sight.

He can emulate Gento as a six-time winner of the European Cup/Champions League if Juve capture the trophy and he will join Clarence Seedorf as the only other player to triumph with three different clubs.

Should Ronaldo end the campaign as top scorer in Serie A he would become the first player to achieve that feat in three major European leagues.

His is the most compelling narrative of the 2018-19 season in European football, even more so than the rejuvenation of Borussia Dortmund or the surge of Liverpool.

Juventus coach Max Allegri must have been concerned that the acquisition of Ronaldo, which was always going to be a roaring commercial and corporate success, might destabilise an already powerful team.

Instead, they have improved, and Allegri's verdict of the Portuguese is exultant, saying: "Every day he makes us a better team, and his concentration and commitment is 100 per cent. He makes a difference."

> "Every day he makes us a better team, and his concentration and commitment is 100 per cent. He makes a difference"
>
> Juventus boss Max Allegri on Cristiano Ronaldo

Comfort zone...Lionel Messi

Meanwhile, Messi is still scoring for fun at Barcelona, still jinking and weaving and taking the breath away. But he is still in his comfort zone. Messi has never played for a club other than Barca – and the question that has always lingered in the air is now more profound and pertinent than ever: could he triumph elsewhere?

Could he do what Diego Maradona did and inspire a club like Napoli to glory? Could he come to the Premier League and do something similar for Tottenham Hotspur with their brilliant Argentinian manager Mauricio Pochettino?

Many of the other all-time greats have proved themselves at more than one club. Johan Cruyff did so at Ajax and Barca. For Ferenc Puskas it was Honved and Real Madrid. Zinedine Zidane was a superstar at Juventus and Real Madrid. The forgotten great Juan Alberto Schiaffino was a legend at Penarol and Milan.

Isn't it time for Messi to do the same? To take a risk as they all did? To take on the challenge that might actually invigorate his football career and cement a legacy as the greatest of all time?

There is nothing left for him to prove at Barcelona, but it seems to me there is a sense that something truly precious is missing from his football story. WS

Keir RADNEDGE

THE INSIDER

Asian Cup overshadowed by controversy

Asia, the most complex of the six regional confederations operating under the FIFA aegis, continues to become ever more powerful, with the potential for further growth at a time when Europe is maxing out on money, structure and talent.

International power politics within Asia have cast their own pall, most recently with the detention of former Bahrain international Hakeem Al Araibi in Thailand and the unnecessary theatre surrounding the presence of the 2019 Asian Cup organising president in the United Arab Emirates.

Al Araibi, who fled to Australia in 2014 – and settled in Melbourne where he plays for Pascoe Vale – was detained before Christmas in Thailand pending consideration of an extradition request from Bahrain. He had flown to Thailand on a permitted holiday without realising that this is a state that does not subscribe to international agreements concerning refugee status.

He insists that he fled Bahrain because he had been tortured for criticising Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim Al Khalifa – subsequently the AFC president and FIFA vice-president – for failing to protect athletes targeted in connection with pro-democracy protests in 2011. Sheikh Salman, a member of the Bahraini royal family, denies any involvement in an issue that harmed his failed bid for the FIFA presidency in 2016.

Protest...human rights groups and the Australian football community campaign for the release of Hakeem Al Araibi

> Sheikh Salman has been handed high-profile opportunities to show clear leadership – and the chance to take his influence beyond Asia

The Australian government and the country's football federation, as well as FIFA, have urged the Thais to release Al Araibi, who fears being tortured again if he is returned to Bahrain.

The issue of human rights has proved a testing governance subject for football and nowhere has more challenges than Asia.

FIFA adopted a formal "human rights policy" in May 2017 after criticism of its attitude to construction workers' conditions in Qatar ahead of the 2022 World Cup and human rights observance has since been incorporated into its event-bidding guidelines.

As for the AFC, Article Three of its statutes commits "to respecting all internationally recognised human rights and shall strive to promote the protection of these rights".

But words do not automatically mean actions.

This year's Asian Cup kicked off in the UAE against the background of a political and economic stand-off between neighbouring Qatar and an antagonistic Saudi Arabia-led coalition, which includes the UAE. Hence it was no real surprise when the UAE initially barred entry to senior Qatari official Saoud Al Mohannadi, who chaired the AFC organising committee of the Asian Cup.

Barred...Saoud Al Mohannadi

Al Mohannadi complained to Sheikh Salman, who complained to the UAE authorities, who then duly welcomed Al Mohannadi in time to chair the local organising committee meeting on the eve of kick-off.

Coincidentally, Al Mohannadi is also running against Sheikh Salman in the AFC presidential election in April, for which Sheikh Salman remains the clear favourite.

As with the Al Araibi situation, Sheikh Salman has been handed high-profile opportunities to show clear leadership – and the chance to take his influence beyond Asia.

While Saudi-based BeoutQ was "stealing" coverage of the World Cup and Champions League, the AFC appeared to happily stand back. But it was a different matter entirely for the confederation when the broadcaster started pirating games at the Asian Cup...

FA Cup changes should be celebrated not regretted

Tradition is central to the longevity of association football. The continuous narrative of national teams and clubs is the foundation on which the greatest players come and delight, and then pass on the baton to a new generation.

Permanence plus perpetual renewal is the dynamic which has forged the great popularity of team sports down the decades.

But appreciation of the past should not discount evolution as stagnation is a dead end. This is why the changing nature of the FA Cup should be a cause for celebration not regret.

Today's English football scene is very different from the days when all the early round cup ties kicked off simultaneously on a Saturday, but the command of television brings positives as well as negatives.

Yes, the varied kick-offs over four days are a problem for travelling fans. But an away tie at Newcastle United or Sunderland or Middlesbrough was a problem for followers of Southampton or Bournemouth or Plymouth Argyle back in the days before motorways and high-speed trains.

The explosion in league football's financial rewards does lead some managers to field weakened line-ups in the FA Cup, but that offers the minnows greater hope of springing the sort of surprise for which the competition continues to be so popular.

Also, spreading the ties over four days allows the third round to dominate the football conversation for an entire weekend, not merely one afternoon.

Looking further afield, competition evolution should not only be suffered but embraced. The initial stage of the UEFA Nations League proved such a success that the European federation raised the prize money. It also reinforced the desire of FIFA president Gianni Infantino to take the concept worldwide.

The Club World Cup, by contrast, remains so fragile that near-panic was generated by the possibility that South America might not be able to provide the glamour of its champions in December. Hence the unseemly haste to send River Plate and Boca Juniors to Madrid for their Libertadores Cup Final showdown en route to the United Arab Emirates.

Change here is essential. But if FIFA can find the right sporting formula, the rest will look after itself.

FA Cup upset... Newport County beat Leicester City (in white)

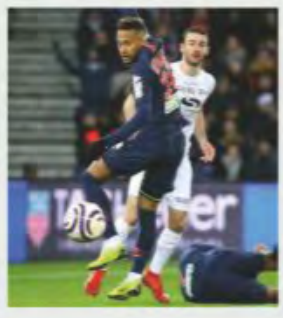
WINNERS

REAL MADRID
Crowned the Club World Cup champions for a record-breaking fourth time.

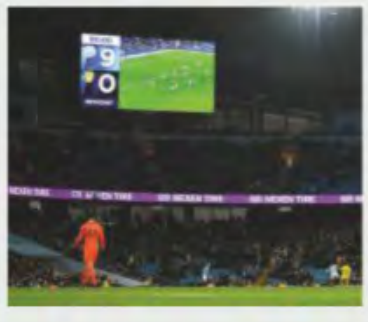
OLE GUNNAR SOLSKJAER
A 1-0 win away at Tottenham saw him become the first man to win his first six games in all competitions as manager of Manchester United.

ANDREZIEUX
The club from the Championnat National 2 – the fourth tier of French football – knocked Marseille out of the Cup with a 2-0 home win.

LOSERS



PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN
Lost for the first time in domestic football, and only the second time in all competitions this season, when Guingamp knocked them out of the French League Cup at Parc des Princes.



BURTON ALBION
The third-tier side reached the League Cup semi-finals for the first time, but lost 9-0 to Manchester City in the first leg.

MILOVAN RAJEVAC
The Serbian was sacked as Thailand coach after his team were beaten 4-1 by India in their first game at the Asian Cup.

Jonathan WILSON

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

Out of time but not out of step

When Jose Mourinho left Manchester United in December it was widely believed that a major factor had been his perceived failure to move with the times. While almost every other elite team pressed ferociously, he preferred a low block, he liked his side to sit deep and play on the counter.

It seemed out of sync with the times. Yet what has been noticeable in the Premier League this season is how Liverpool especially, and Manchester City to a lesser extent, have adopted a slightly more measured approach. Just as Mourinho is dismissed for not taking an ultra-attacking approach, so those who have expounded that philosophy more forcefully are taking a step back.

Let's begin with Mourinho and his supposed obsolescence. It happens to managers. Very few endure much more than a decade at the highest level. Most end up becoming parodies of themselves, asking not how best to solve a problem but attempting to solve a problem in a characteristic way.

Mourinho has become notably more negative as time has gone by, pragmatism morphing into instinctive defensiveness. Does that mean, though, that a low block is entirely outmoded at elite level, that everybody has to play some variant of the press-and-possess style?

Intuitively, that feels unlikely. One of football's enduring beauties is that there is no one right way to play. Philosophies come along, have their moment of supremacy, are overwhelmed, mutate and adapt to the challenges faced, and then return in a slightly different form.

Gone...Jose Mourinho (centre) at Manchester United

"Guardiola takes a big risk and that's why he can lose. The space behind is too big for the central defenders and he doesn't have such fast central defenders"

Louis Van Gaal

Pressure...Arsenal's Henrikh Mkhitaryan causes problems for United's defence

The two teams that won the biggest tournaments last season, the World Cup and the Champions League, were not press-and-possess sides.

France under Didier Deschamps seemed a throwback; an instinctively cautious side who pressed infrequently. Real Madrid, meanwhile, often seemed to have no great cohesive strategy beyond having very good players. Their lack of compactness – perhaps the most vital structural component in a press-and-possess game – made them vulnerable, but they prevailed thanks to Cristiano Ronaldo's goals, Luka Modric's passing, the defensive pairing of Sergio Ramos and Raphael Varane, and the tendency of opposing keepers to make horrendous mistakes.

In terms of preparation, Mourinho has always been sceptical of the "automations" preferred by some other top coaches: the practice of set moves to be deployed when the time is right. His argument was always that football is too random for pre-packaged units of play to be useful. He preferred to condition a mentality so players would make the right decisions when the circumstances presented themselves.

In the past, at Porto, Chelsea (the first time) and Internazionale, that worked for Mourinho. It seems hard to believe either football or players have changed so much in eight years that only the automation route can work now. What seems far more likely is that Mourinho has changed, that he finds younger players difficult to relate to, that he has lost some of the charm that once made him great. Combine that with the pervading sense that he is not quite as tactically on top of the game as he once was and the result is a toxic spiral.

The irony is that Mourinho's dismissal from United feels as though it could finish him at the highest level – just as Jurgen Klopp and Pep Guardiola have begun to temperate their approaches.

Mourinho's predecessor at United, Louis Van Gaal, believes he has seen a flaw in how Manchester City play. "A lot of times he [Guardiola] has two full-backs in front of the central defenders," he says. "I had always one at the other side back. Guardiola takes a big risk

and that's why he can lose. The space behind is too big for the central defenders and he doesn't have such fast central defenders.

"That's a difference with me – he takes more risks. I had always that when the right full-back is going up, the left-back has to squeeze, and with Guardiola they can play inside and outside.

"The defensive problem is that the space will be bigger. You can solve that when you have individually the players who can play under the pressure of City. Liverpool did it – a pass to Salah or Firmino and then they are gone."

Other teams – Lyon, Chelsea, Leicester City, Crystal Palace – have begun to exploit that same weakness this season. If you can get through the press – which is difficult – City are vulnerable. Guardiola has begun to adjust. In the 0-0 draw at Anfield in October, City effectively played a 4-4-2, protecting the full-backs, of whom only Benjamin Mendy really

Upset...Wilfried Zaha's Crystal Palace beat City

attacked, with Kyle Walker tucking in. At the Etihad in January, the deployment of Aymeric Laporte at left-back, although partly conditioned by injury, seemed significant, effectively ensuring only one full-back, Danilo in this case, pushed on.

Liverpool, similarly, have been more conservative this season. Statistics from Opta show that they've been regaining the ball roughly 10 per cent less in their opponent's final third this season when compared to last and that their full-backs are running three per cent less per game.

For the past couple of seasons the latter stages of the Champions League have seen dramatic games often predicated on poor defending.

The fact that big teams rarely have to defend hasn't gone away, but it does seem that just as Mourinho has left the game, it is taking a step back to a mode of football with which he would perhaps be more comfortable. WS

REPORTS WE COULDN'T MAKE UP

1 RISKI ETHICAL DECISION

Finnish international Riku Riski refused to attend his national team's training camp in Qatar for "ethical reasons" in protest at the Middle Eastern state's human rights record.

The 29-year-old HJK Helsinki forward was called up by Finland, who were one of a number of sides whose warm-weather training camps were hosted by the gas-rich state.

Qatar has been criticised by human rights campaigners, including Amnesty International, for their treatment of workers employed on 2022 World Cup construction projects.

"After I received the invitation I discussed the matter with coach Lennart Wangel and the head coach Markku Kanerva," says Riski. "The reasons behind my decision were ethical. I think there were values I wanted to stick to."

2 ADAMS SWITCHES CODES

Former Arsenal and England defender Tony Adams has been named Rugby Football League president.

"I am passionate about working with everyone in the sport to raise the profile of mental health, wellness and resilience, for players and for everyone in rugby league," says Adams, who has worked alongside the RFL with his charity Sporting Chance.

"I'd like to play my part in championing this brilliant sport on the national stage."

3 CHRISTMAS CHEER AT BETIS

Real Betis fans gave children in Seville a special Christmas treat during their 1-1 Liga draw with Eibar.

They responded to an appeal by throwing thousands of teddy bears and other soft toys from the stands of the Estadio Benito Villamarin.

The toys were gathered up before the second half and distributed to local disadvantaged families.

Footing the bill ...Rafinha

4 THE BOOT-IFUL GAME

Barcelona midfielder Rafinha faces being fined up to €1million unless he plays in Adidas boots.

The 25-year-old Brazilian international has been wearing blacked-out Mizuno boots since the start of this season as he thought that his sponsorship deal with the German sportswear manufacturer had ended.

However, a court order means that he must pay a fine of €10,000 for each day that he refuses to honour his contract, up to a maximum of €1m.

Adidas, however, could have to wait a while for their money as Rafinha won't play again this season after tearing the anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee against Atletico Madrid.

5 GRANT GRAPPLING WITH A NEW CAREER

Former Norwich City striker Grant Holt will make a surprise return to his former club's Carrow Road ground on June 2 – as the headline act in a World Association of Wrestling show.

The 37-year-old retired from football in August 2018 and then swapped the pitch for the ring, making his debut as a wrestler the following month.

Holt says that his former club have "bent over backwards" in helping to organise the event and it is hoped that the show will attract the biggest crowd for a UK independent wrestling show in more than 30 years.

Rugby president ...Tony Adams

Charity...Real Betis fans donate toys

"All clubs are looking for more income, but why? All this craziness just so a player can have five Lamborghinis in his garage instead of two"

Atletico Madrid CEO Gil Marin reflects on player greed

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

IN

Turkish delight ...Robinho

EUROPE

Norwegian club Molde, whose season doesn't start until March, allowed **OLE GUNNAR SOLSKJAER** to become caretaker manager of Manchester United following the sacking of Jose Mourinho.

Ex-Brazil forward **ROBINHO**, who set a British record in 2008 on joining Manchester City from Real Madrid for £32.5m, joined Turkish league leaders Istanbul Basaksehir from Sivasspor.

MARTIN O'NEILL, who won back-to-back European Cups as a player with Nottingham Forest, was appointed manager of the Championship club, while **JOSE GOMES** left Portuguese top-flight side Rio Ave to take charge of Reading.

Portuguese side Benfica appointed **BRUNO LAGE** as coach following the departure of Rui Vitoria.

ANTOINE KOMBOUARE replaced Olivier Dall'Oglio as coach of Dijon, while fellow Ligue 1 strugglers Monaco brought in former Marseille boss **FRANCK PASSI** to assist Thierry Henry.

Double Dutch...Peter Bosz (left) and Jaap Stam

Dutchman **PETER BOSZ**, who lasted just five months at Borussia Dortmund in 2017, replaced Heiko Herrlich in charge at Bayer Leverkusen.

Eredivisie strugglers PEC Zwolle appointed former Holland defender **JAAP STAM** as coach.

MARCO BARONI, who in 2017 guided Benevento into Serie A for the first time in their history, replaced Moreno Longo as coach of Frosinone.

Reserve coach **IMANOL ALGUACIL** was given the top job at Real Sociedad after they sacked Asier Garitano.

Anderlecht appointed Dutchman **FRED RUTTEN** as coach after sacking coach Hein Vanhaezebrouck following a series of poor results that led to their exit from the Europa League and left them fourth in the Belgian league.

AFRICA

Uruguayan **MARTIN LASARTE** took charge of Al Ahly, replacing French coach Patrice Carteron who left the Egyptian side after they finished runners-up in the AFC Champions League.

Serbian coach **KOSTA PAPIC** took charge of Eswatini, the country formerly known as Swaziland.

SOUTH AMERICA

Fluminense of Brazil appointed **FERNANDO DINIZ** as coach.

EDUARDO VILLEGAS was named coach of Bolivia, while Spaniard **MIGUEL ANGEL PORTUGAL** took over at Apertura winners Jorge Wilstermann.

CONCACAF

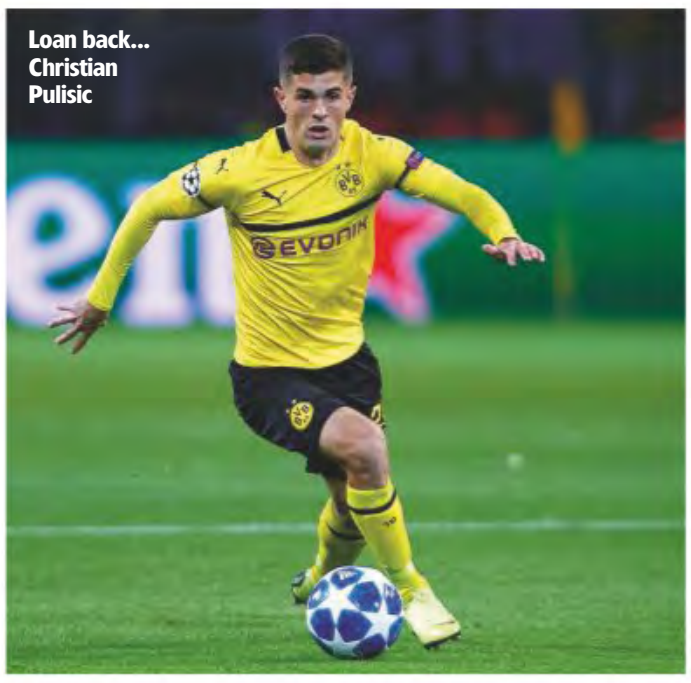
Former Paraguay and Argentina boss **GERARDO MARTINO** took charge of his third national side when appointed coach of Mexico.

GUILLERMO BARROS SCHELOTTO took charge of LA Galaxy, Atlanta United appointed **FRANK DE BOER**, 38-year-old **LUCHI GONZALEZ** became MLS' second-youngest coach after taking over at Dallas and Columbus Crew appointed **CALEB PORTER**.

DAVE SARACHAN, who was USA caretaker coach for nearly all of 2018, took charge of USL side North Carolina, replacing former Northern Ireland striker Colin Clarke.

ASIA

QUIQUE SANCHEZ FLORES was appointed coach of Chinese Super League side Shanghai Shenhua.



Loan back... Christian Pulisic

Chelsea pay record fee for US starlet

CHRISTIAN PULISIC became the most expensive American player of all time when Chelsea paid Borussia Dortmund €64million for the 20-year-old.

Pulisic has been loaned back to Dortmund for the remainder of the Bundesliga season.

"If players of colour say 'we won't play' and go through with it, then many people will lose money. And when you touch someone's wallet, I can tell you they will find solutions"

Former Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o on how to tackle racism

Appointments, sackings and loans

EUROPE

Having taken Huddersfield Town into the Premier League in 2017, **DAVID WAGNER** left by mutual consent.

Arsenal goalkeeper **PETR CECH** says he will retire at the end of this season.

AFRICA

Ugandan Premier League champions Vipers sacked Mexican coach **JAVIER MARTINEZ ESPINOZA** after barely five months in charge.

No more Roar ...John Aloisi

ASIA

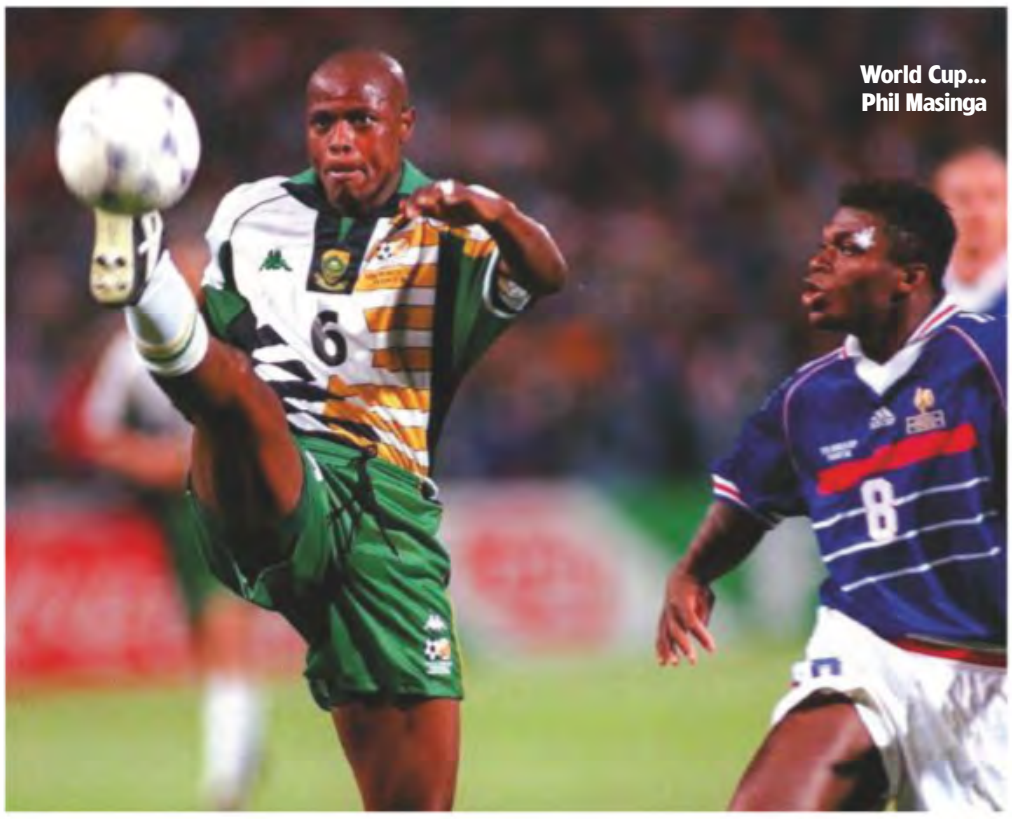
At the Asian Cup, Thailand sacked Serbian coach **MILOVAN RAJEVAC** after they lost their opening game. **BERND STANGE** lasted one game longer before being dismissed by Syria, and **STEPHEN CONSTANTINE** resigned after India failed to reach the knockout stage.

JOHN ALOISI quit as coach of A-League side Brisbane Roar after a poor start to the season.

Qatari champions Al Duhail terminated the contract of Tunisia World Cup coach **NABIL MAALOUL** by mutual consent.

Mutual... Nabil Maaloul

OBITUARIES



World Cup... Phil Masinga

Peter HILL-WOOD (1936-2018)
Joined the Arsenal board in 1962 and became chairman in 1982 following the death of his father, Denis. Presiding over the managerial appointments of George Graham and Arsene Wenger – who won five league titles, five FA Cups, the League Cup and European Cup-winners Cup between them – he also oversaw the club's move from Highbury to Emirates Stadium in 2006 before stepping down in 2013.

Phil MASINGA (1969-2019)
Scored the goal, against Congo in July 1992, that took South Africa to their first-ever World Cup finals, where he made two appearances. Capped 58 times by his country, he was in the side that won the 1996 African Nations Cup.

Sigi SCHMID (1953-2018)
West German-born coach who moved to southern California when he was four years old, he won the MLS Cup with Los Angeles Galaxy (2002) and Columbus Crew (2008) and holds the league record with 266 regular-season and post-season victories.

Dragoslav SEKULARAC (1937-2019)
An attacking midfielder with Belgrade side Red Star, he played 470 games for the club over 11 years, winning the league title five times. Known by fans as the "king of dribble", he was capped 41 times by Yugoslavia.

Bill SLATER (1927-2018)
Capped 12 times by England, the Wolverhampton Wanderers captain won three league titles and the FA Cup. The only part-time player to be named Footballer of the Year, he won the award in 1960 while studying for a BSc degree at university. Selected for Great Britain at the 1952 Olympic Games, he became president of the British Gymnastics Association in 1989, and received an OBE in 1982 and CBE in 1998.

Peter THOMPSON (1942-2018)
Spent 10 years as a winger with Liverpool, helping the club to win two league titles, the FA Cup for the first time, in 1965, and was also a European Cup-winners Cup finalist a year later. Capped 16 times by England, he was named in the initial squads for the 1966 and 1970 World Cups but was cut from the final 22 for both tournaments.

Reds winger... Peter Thompson

Brian GLANVILLE

THE VOICE OF FOOTBALL

Off...Marko Arnautovic appears to bid farewell to West Ham fans after the game against Arsenal

London clubs are playing fast and loose with the transfer market

Will West Ham United allow their star turn, Marko Arnautovic, to leave them for Chinese gold?

The player wants to leave immediately, with his brother pointing out that the Hammers would make a significant profit on the deal. Arnautovic's advisors say that their man would earn a massive £80,000 a week more by going to China. That he should insist on leaving at once seems a poor return for the admiration he has received from the West Ham fans and the club's generosity.

It would clearly be a heavy blow to the club to lose him at such a tense moment in their season, though some experts still say it would be best to let him go since his enduring presence might see him undermine morale in the dressing room.

Can the player be blamed for, so to speak, being Shanghaied and getting his hands on so much money? Frankly I see it as essentially an essay in greed.

He will be committing himself to a country whose football is negligible in international terms. Apart from the huge amount of money, what satisfaction would he get as a football giant among a collection of football pygmies?

Across London at Arsenal, you wonder how they could have been so crass and spendthrift as to give a colossal £350,000-a-week contract to Germany's Mesut Ozil?

At the time of writing, Ozil is not even on the bench for the Gunners and, despite his undoubted talents, when he does play he is often on the margins of the game.

Yet the Gunners seem to be perfectly, if bizarrely, happy to be losing their Welsh international midfielder Aaron Ramsey, to a club as big as Juventus, for absolutely nothing when his contract expires in the summer. This is a player who, when called upon, has made a large contribution to the functioning of the team either in central midfield of playing behind the striker.

Leaving...Arsenal's Aaron Ramsey

That Ramsey should be allowed to leave at all seems strange; that he be allowed to leave for nothing is even stranger. Given the vast amounts of money poured out on Ozil, surely whatever demands Ramsey may have made to sign a new contract could have been met with little difficulty?

And let us not even talk about Fulham, who spent a reported £100million on players in the summer but now look doomed to eventual relegation, even if they now have in charge Claudio Ranieri, who does seem to have tightened a chaotic defence. The word is that the summer transfers were conducted – or misconducted – by the owner's son.

Who'd blame Hudson-Odoi?

You can hardly blame Chelsea's 18-year-old winger Callum Hudson-Odoi for demanding a transfer, with Bayern Munich reportedly prepared to pay some £40million for him.

I saw him play havoc with Nottingham Forest's defence once he had switched from the left wing to the right wing, emerging for my money as the best player on the field. But that, admittedly, was an FA Cup game against inferior opposition. Against Newcastle United he only got on as an 81st-minute substitute.

Chelsea have an embarrassment of riches even though that doesn't included a dominant centre-forward, with the result that Eden Hazard has recently been wasted there. Yet a player as gifted as Ruben Loftus-Cheek, a full England international, cannot find a place at the moment even on the subs' bench and would arguably have been so much better off staying on loan at Crystal Palace, where he had been flourishing until recalled to Stamford Bridge.

Chelsea are reported to have over 30 of their youngsters out on loan. Leaving Chelsea, if you're a gifted teenage winger like Hudson-Odoi with no guarantee of a regular place, surely makes sense even though Gianfranco Zola, back at the club as an assistant coach, has urged him to stay, pointing out that the present incumbents are not getting any younger.

Held back...Callum Hudson-Odoi saw limited action against Newcastle United

De Gea, a gloriously modern keeper

Long ago, back in the 1950s, I heard a little old man say in the Queens Park Rangers press box: "A good goalkeeper can break your hearts."

Which brings us to Manchester United keeper David De Gea, whose recent display at Wembley against Tottenham Hotspur was formidable, inspired and utterly decisive.

Well might Tottenham manager Mauricio Pochettino state that his team had given one of its best displays of the season. Time after time, often with his formidable feet, De Gea frustrated the lively Spurs attack. Alex Stepney, no mean keeper himself in his playing days at United, said of De Gea: "His saves with his feet are incredible."

It remains to be seen whether Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, who has radically changed and vastly improved the mood at Old Trafford, will keep the United job at the end of the season as he is current;y on loan from his Norwegian club Molde, who understandably want him back.

He may have been lucky at Wembley but United could do a great deal worse than to keep him in office.

Ronaldo case is a sordid business

The alarming rape charge against one of the game's outstanding players has a somewhat baffling aspect. If nothing had gone amiss between Ronaldo and the woman who is now accusing him, then why did he pay her a massive £300,000? And having accepted that payment, why is she now bringing these severe accusations against him?

Something must surely have happened; you do not pocket such a huge amount of money for no good or bad reason.

Neither party in this sordid affair seems beyond approach. If Ronaldo is or was guilty of rape as the woman insists, why accept the pay-off but then behave as though it had never been made?

A plague on both your houses seems a permissible response to this horrid affair. Potential guilt on the one side, manifest greed on the other.

In the news...David De Gea (above) stops Tottenham, while Cristiano Ronaldo (right) is under attack

Read Brian Glanville's weekly online column at worldsoccer.com

NEW RELEASES

NIKE PHANTOM

One pass. One shot. That's all it takes. Alongside the playmakers' favourite Phantom VSN, Nike's Game Over pack features the brand new Phantom VNM, now worn by lethal strikers like Harry Kane and Marcus Rashford.

Nike Phantom VNM Elite FG
QR: 197744 - **£220**

Nike Phantom VSN Elite DF FG
QR: 197762 - **£230**

Nike Mercurial collection online
Available from £18

NEW RELEASES

NIKE MERCURIAL

Where the Phantom ends it with precision, the new Mercurial ends it with speed. The latest colourway boasts the fastest look yet, featuring streamlined cheetah-inspired stripes. No wonder Mbappe can't wait to wear them.

Nike Mercurial Superfly VI Elite FG
QR: 197781 - **£230**

Nike Mercurial Vapor XII Elite FG
QR: 197800 - **£210**

Nike Mercurial collection online
Available from £18

NEW RELEASES

ADIDAS EXHIBIT PACK

Fake it till you make it? Nah. The adidas Exhibit pack is for creators only, so if you want to wear the new Copa, Nemeziz, X, or Predator, you'd better make sure you have the skills to back them up.

adidas collection online
Available from £18

adidas Copa collection online
Available from £27

adidas Nemeziz collection online
Available from £27

adidas X collection online
Available from £30

adidas Predator collection online
Available from £30

eyewitness

Joel Richards in Buenos Aires

ARGENTINA

River celebrate 'eternal' triumph

Libertadores champions ignore Club World Cup setback

One month on, the euphoria at El Monumental is far from subsiding. "River Plate won the most important Libertadores Cup of all time," reads the club's exuberant website, "and the trophy will be here for eternity."

Three other Libertadores trophies surround the latest piece of silverware in the club museum. But none of those titles – won in 1986, 1996 and 2015 – carry the emotional baggage of beating arch-rivals Boca Juniors in the so-called "Final of all Finals" in 2018.

Not even crashing out of the Club World Cup in the semi-finals against Al Ain of the UAE on penalties could take the fizz out of the celebrations.

The failure of South American champions to qualify for the Club World Cup Final, to once again play Real Madrid, is as historic as the Libertadores win itself, as River joined Internacional (2010), Atletico Mineiro (2013) and Atletico National (2016) as Libertadores winners who have failed to reach the showpiece of the competition. For all its shortcomings, the Club World Cup, as a re-incarnation of the Intercontinental Cup, is viewed as an opportunity for South American clubs to measure up against the best European sides.

River's failure to reach the 2018 Final, plus the continent's best player, Gonzalo Martinez, preferring to play in MLS with Atlanta United, raise increasingly urgent questions about the quality, condition and future of South American football. Falling short against financially stronger European clubs in a Final is one thing; not even getting beyond the semi-finals is quite another.

> "In Mendoza, in La Boca, in the Copa and in Europa"
>
> **The wording on T-shirts celebrating River successes against Boca in 2018**

Yet the conversation in Argentina, or at least at River, swiftly moved on from the Club World Cup. Or rather than ▸

Proud...River fans did not let Club World Cup disappointment overshadow their continental success

Back home...River Plate parade around El Monumental with the Libertadores Cup

moving on, it simply moved back to the Libertadores.

River announced that those who had tickets for the suspended return leg of the Libertadores, ultimately played in Madrid, could take their original seat for a trophy parade. Meanwhile, the investigation into the attack on the Boca bus continues, but has reportedly found that police vacated the area 15 minutes prior to the attack – which is expected to exonerate River of any responsibility.

Amid the celebrations emerged the supporters' hymn sheet, which ignores coach Marcelo Gallardo disregarding his semi-final touchline ban and the scandal over Bruno Zuculini's inclusion despite the midfielder not serving a previous suspension. As River supporters will inform anyone listening, unlike Boca they enjoyed neither the advantage of playing one of the Libertadores Final legs at home nor the opportunity of playing in front of their fans with no away support. In Madrid, unlike at the Bombonera, both sets of supporters were allowed in.

River's 2018 record against Boca was that of winners in the Argentinian Super Cup in Mendoza, winners away in the league, a draw in the Libertadores first leg and victory in Spain. "In Mendoza, in La Boca, in the Copa and in Europa" read the commemorative T-shirts.

And adding to the club's swelling pride was Gallardo being voted South American coach of the year in the annual poll organised by Uruguayan newspaper *El Pais*, with River players filling the podium. Martinez was voted South American player of the year, followed by playmaker Juan Quintero and goalkeeper Franco Armani.

This perhaps goes some way to explaining the mood in the north of Buenos Aires, though it is not only supporters who are rushing to buy clothes or have tattoos to commemorate the Libertadores win. Enzo Perez, who missed the penalty that handed the Club World Cup Final to Al Ain, had the club badge and the Virgin Mary tattooed on his back. Quintero also had River's colours and the Libertadores trophy inked into his skin.

Other River players already had a club tattoo on show in the dressing room, one of whom was Jonathan Maidana. He is one of the few survivors from when the club was relegated in 2011. River crowned their comeback from that fall by adding the Libertadores in 2015 to the previous year's Sudamericana Cup victory.

But in 2018, against Boca, it was winner takes all.

Naturally, Boca see it differently, or at least are trying to. "They [River] will know if this game or the one against Belgrano was more important," said the retired number 10 Juan Roman Riquelme –

Cycle of events... River players return to training (above), while boss Marcelo Gallardo was named South American coach of the year (left)

Triple...River's three previous Libertadores

Boca boss...Gustavo Alfaro (centre)

COACHING MOVES

- New Boca Juniors boss **Gustavo Alfaro** was replaced at Huracan by **Antonio Mohamed**, while former international striker **Hernan Crespo** took charge of Banfield, replacing Julio **Cesar Falcioni**.
- **Marcelo Gomez** took over as boss of Godoy Cruz after **Diego Dabove** left for Argentinos Juniors to replace **Ezequiel Carboni**.
- **Julio Comesana** was appointed in place of **Eduardo Dominguez** at Colon.

referring to River's relegation – ever as incisive a speaker as he was a passer of the ball. This year Riquelme is expected to throw his hat into the ring when Boca holds presidential elections.

Boca's current president Daniel Angelici has already begun the process of restructuring the club.

Coach Guillermo Barros Schelotto returned to the United States, where as a player for Columbus Crew he won MVP of the year in 2008. At LA Galaxy he will coach the likes of Zlatan Ibrahimovic.

Replacing Barros Schelotto is 56-year-old Gustavo Alfaro, an experienced, media-savvy, defensive-minded coach.

"I have come to win the Libertadores," he said at his official presentation. To date, Alfaro's major titles have been at Arsenal, a small club founded by late AFA president Julio Grondona, where he won the 2007 Sudamericana, as well as the league, Super Cup and Argentinian Cup in 2013.

"Boca is obliged by history," he added. It is 11 years since Boca were last South American champions, but with six titles the club is just one short of drawing level with Independiente as the club with most Libertadores trophies.

Alfaro's immediate job is not only to prune a bloated squad and answer questions about how he will employ Carlos Tevez in the team but, more crucially, to lift the mood at the club.

While the close-season rumour mill spins on, one of the most notable arrivals – or returns – to Boca is Nicolas Burdisso as sporting director. Burdisso, who decided on Alfaro's appointment, has seven winners medals from his time at Boca, including three Libertadores and two Intercontinental trophies, won during the stunningly successful early 2000s.

The question is whether the one-time centre-back can now deliver where his former boss did not. Carlos Bianchi, Burdisso's coach when he was a player at Boca, could not reproduce the magic touch in the director's role, lasting only a year in the position. The formal role of sports director is still not fully established at many clubs in Argentina.

Boca may have won back-to-back league titles but the Libertadores loss to River will loom large. "At Boca there is no purgatory," says new coach Alfaro. "There is heaven or hell." WS

> "At Boca there is no purgatory. There is heaven or hell"
> **The club's new coach, Gustavo Alfaro**

Forgotten...River watch the shoot-out against Al Ain

Sidelined...Boca's Carlos Tevez

Determined... Basaksehir's Alexandru Epureanu stops Pepe of Besiktas

eyewitness

Patrick Keddie in Istanbul

TURKEY

League turned upside down

Basaksehir have taken advantage of problems facing the "big three" to top the table

Serdar Aziz of Galatasaray began his winter break a little earlier than most. The defender had missed his club's final fixture of 2018 after calling in sick, only to be busted when his wife posted photos on Instagram of the couple holidaying in the Maldives.

In a way, Serdar's shenanigans highlight the sense of decadence and decline that has set in among Turkey's "big three" this season. While defending champions Galatasaray were off the title pace in fifth place at the halfway stage, Besiktas slumped to a mediocre seventh and Fenerbahce were – unthinkably – in the relegation zone.

Meanwhile, at the top of the tree, Istanbul Basaksehir established their dominance after 17 games with a six-point lead in the Super Lig.

At first glance, Basaksehir's position is astonishing for an ex-municipality club that, up until just a few years ago, attracted "crowds" of around 40 people. But as a streamlined start-up with effective management, few hardcore supporters, limited debt and the favour of the government, Basaksehir are perfectly placed to take advantage of the deep financial crisis afflicting the country's biggest sides.

The vast majority of Turkish clubs are member-based associations that elect a president for a rolling two or three-year term. Basaksehir, however, became a private company in 2014.

Without regular elections to win and few fans to placate, the club's administration has been able to make long-term plans and give time to its methodical coach, Abdullah Avci.

Having built the league's meanest defence, conceding just eight goals so far this season, Avci's back line is complemented by the creativity of playmaker Edin Visca, and the nous of veterans such as Emre Belozoglu and Emmanuel Adebayor.

Although the club now attracts attendances of between 2,000 and 5,000, many rival fans deride Basaksehir as a pro-government project team. Located in a conservative stronghold on the margins of Istanbul, the club is owned by several pro-government shareholders and Basaksehir's president is related to the country's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, by marriage.

Unlike most new venues in Turkey, Basaksehir's stadium was built swiftly and efficiently under supervision from the government – Erdogan even scored a hat-trick in the opening exhibition match – and it has attracted significant sponsorship, despite the meagre fan base. Erdogan has made an explicit link between Basaksehir's success and his movement's wider political dominance.

While Basaksehir finished second in 2016-17 and third last season, and have been top of the table at the midway point before, they have never led by such a wide margin.

Aside from Trabzonspor's six titles

High fliers...Basaksehir celebrate a goal against Galatasaray in December

between 1976 and 1984, and Bursaspor's triumph in 2010, every Turkish league title has been won by either Besiktas, Fenerbahce, or Galatasaray. While the "big three" are supported by around 80 per cent of the country, and each have their own unique challenges, all three are mired in crippling, spiralling debts that have largely been caused by sustained overspending on transfers and wages.

As member-based associations rather than private entities, most clubs have been exempt from basic commercial oversight, which has enabled ambitious presidents – under pressure from fans, the media and regular elections – to bring in ageing foreign stars for inflated sums, rather than nurturing young talent, free from much financial scrutiny.

Over time, Turkey became the only European country where club debts and liabilities are bigger than club assets, and the vast majority of this debt is held by the big clubs.

This long-standing crisis has now reached a critical point. As a wider economic downturn adds to the sense of malaise, UEFA's Financial Fairplay (FFP) regulations have also started to bite this season.

The big clubs, under strict FFP austerity agreements, have been increasingly offloading their best players and failing to adequately replace them. As a result, they have been left noticeably toothless, struggling to crack open the league's many tightly drilled defences.

In the summer Galatasaray shipped out top scorer Bafetimbi Gomis and have been left with only one – distinctly mediocre – out-and-out striker. Besiktas sold Cenk Tosun to Everton last January and their four strikers have managed just 10 league goals between them in the first half of this season. Fenerbahce's Islam Slimani has scored one goal in 14 league appearances.

The rapid decline of the biggest clubs has left the league unpredictable and tight, with only 13 points separating second place and the relegation zone.

A team that puts together a good run can soar up the table; Trabzonspor climbed to second with an attacking style of play that clicked in recent weeks. Yeni Malatayaspor find themselves in third after their solid defence and effective counter-attacking game saw an impressive run that included a victory over Galatasaray. Kasimpasa have been fired to fourth by a dangerous front three that includes Mbaye Diagne, who is the Super Lig's top scorer with 20 goals.

A congested table also means teams can quickly find themselves in trouble, especially if they are experiencing financial problems. Ankaragucu made a good start to the season but began slipping as reports emerged of players

Fan...Recep Tayyip Erdogan (centre)

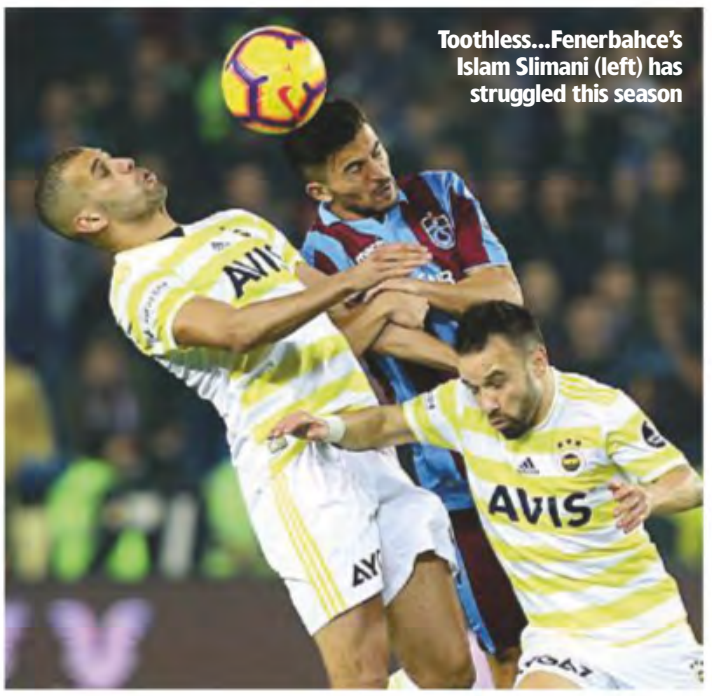
Fiery...Galatasaray and Fenerbahce players clash

Xxxxxxxx

and members of staff going unpaid.

A government-led plan to bring club spending in line with their income could help make the clubs more transparent and accountable, though a move to restructure their debt has drawn criticism. The bigger clubs may also become more inclined to develop young players; Galatasaray's 18-year-old centre-back Ozan Kabak has emerged this season, partly due to a lack of more experienced signings.

Alternatively, it could mark an even deeper descent into financial madness and a decline in quality and interest.



Toothless...Fenerbahce's Islam Slimani (left) has struggled this season

The big three's current predicament is untenable for their increasingly restive fans and members. Despite their financial strictures, club presidents were under huge pressure to act decisively during the January transfer window.

Besiktas signed Burak Yilmaz – a proven goalscorer, but an expensive addition for a 33-year-old whose wages are thought to be at least €2million a season. Fenerbahce's president Ali Koc even appeared to suggest that they could disregard FFP rules in order to pursue domestic success.

In the second half of the season it should become clearer how serious Turkish football is about grappling with its increasing problems and if there will be a restoration of the traditional elite or the start of a new era of sustained hegemony for Basaksehir.

At Basaksehir the stands are often filled with the ambient sound of sunflower seeds being nibbled as most spectators seem to be snacking onlookers – which is a far cry from the blood and thunder of the big three.

In a country that is renowned for the passion of its fans, a league title for a government-backed club with very few serious supporters could trigger some serious existential angst. WS

Patrick Keddie is author of The Passion: Football and the Story of Modern Turkey

SUPER LIG 2017-2018

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ist Basaksehir	17	10	5	2	22	8	35
Trabzonspor	17	8	5	4	32	22	29
Yeni Malatyaspor	17	8	5	4	26	16	29
Kasimpasa	17	9	2	6	37	28	29
Galatasaray	17	8	5	4	30	21	29
Antalyaspor	17	8	3	6	19	21	27
Besiktas	17	7	5	5	28	23	26
Konyaspor	17	6	7	4	23	20	25
Sivasspor	17	6	6	5	24	23	24
Goztepe	17	7	1	9	18	19	22
Bursaspor	17	4	9	4	17	17	21
Ankaragucu	17	6	2	9	17	26	20
Kayserispor	17	5	4	8	15	25	19
Alanyaspor	17	5	3	9	13	22	18
Akhisarspor	17	4	5	8	19	26	17
Erzurum BB	17	3	7	7	16	22	16
Fenerbahce	17	3	7	7	16	24	16
Rizespor	17	1	9	1	19	28	12

SUPER LIG 2018-19

AKHISARSPOR
A municipality club from the Aegean region. Promoted to the top tier in 2012, they won the Turkish Cup last season.

ALANYASPOR
From the small Mediterranean city of Alanya. Formed in 1948, they joined the Super League for the first time in 2016.

ANKARAGUCU
The best supported club from Turkey's capital city Ankara, their fans are renowned for their passion. After going down to the third tier and almost out of business, they returned to the Super Lig last season but are still in financial peril.

ANTALYASPOR
Three local teams merged in 1966 to form a club in the coastal city of Antalya. An ageing Samuel Eto'o spearheaded the attack between 2015 and 2018.

BESIKTAS
Turkey's third-best supported club, they have won 15 league titles and were last champions in 2017. Under English manager Gordon Milne they won three titles in a row, from 1990 to 1992, and went one whole season unbeaten. Their current line-up features Ricardo Quaresma and Loris Karius.

BURSASPOR
In 2010 they became only the second team from outside Istanbul to win the league. Known for their ferocious support, they have a bitter rivalry with Besiktas.

ERZURUM BB
A municipality club from the eastern Anatolian city of Erzurum, they were promoted to the Super Lig for the first time last year via the play-offs.

CAYKUR RIZESPOR
From the Black Sea city of Rize, they were promoted last season and have yo-yoed between the top two tiers for the last three decades.

FENERBAHCE
Won 19 league titles and reached the 2008 Champions League quarter-finals, but have not won the Super Lig since 2014. Based on the Asian side of Istanbul, their "intercontinental derby" with Galatasaray is one of world football's most bitter rivalries. This is their worst-ever start to a season, with strikers Ismail Slimani and Roberto Soldado managing just one league goal between them so far.

GALATASARAY
Defending champions and the country's most successful team with 21 league titles. The only Turkish team to win a European trophy, with a 2000 UEFA Cup victory over Arsenal on penalties and a subsequent success against Real Madrid in the UEFA Super Cup. Fatih Terim is in his fourth stint as coach at the club.

GOZTEPE
Privately owned and the only Izmir-based club in the top flight. Finished sixth last term after being promoted the season before. The local derby in 1981 against Karsıyaka attracted a crowd of 80,000 – a world record for a second-tier match.

ISTANBUL BASAKSEHIR
Rebranded in 2014, they have the league's oldest squad, with Emre Belozoglu, Emmanuel Adebayor, Gael Clichy, Arda Turan and Robinho – who was signed in January.

KASIMPASA
Play in the Recep Tayyip Erdogan Stadium – the Turkish president grew up in this tough neighbourhood of Istanbul. Like Basaksehir and Goztepe, they are a privately owned club.

KAYSERISPOR
From the Anatolian city of Kayseri, they won the 2008 Turkish Cup.

KONYASPOR
Backed by passionate fans in the conservative central Anatolian city of Konya. They won the Turkish Cup in 2017 – their first major trophy.

SIVASSPOR
Formed in 1967, they were seventh last season. Their best place finish was second in 2009.

TRABZONSPOR
The first Anatolian club to win the league, with all six of their titles coming between 1976 and 1984. They are considered to be the fourth biggest club in Turkey.

YENI MALATYASPOR
Yeni, meaning "new", are the revamped version of a club from Malatya that went bankrupt. Promoted to the Super Lig in 2017, they finished 10th last season.

Ally Samatta

Spearheading Genk's surprise resurgence

On fire...celebrating a goal against Brondby in the Europa League

Threat...taking on Besiktas goalkeeper Loris Karius

Don't be fooled by the revelation that Tanzanian striker Ally Samatta sleeps for at least 14 hours a day. When leading the line for shock Belgian league leaders Genk, the 26-year-old never dozes. In and around the box, he is wide awake.

The scorer of 15 league goals prior to the turn of the year – as well as nine more in the Europa League – he is a frontrunner at the peak of his powers. Far too forceful and determined to be denied, it is incredible to think that Genk paid so little to acquire his services, handing Congolese outfit TP Mazembe just €750,000 for him in January 2016.

Every time the ball runs loose in the box it seems to fall to him and, with such an instinctive poacher to call upon, Genk have every reason to be confident of a rare taste of domestic glory, with what would be only their fourth domestic crown and a first since 2011.

It's very much Genk's title to lose. They have the momentum, the togetherness, the most attractive playing style in the division, an excellent coach in former Belgian international defender Philippe Clement and, last but by no means least, the man known as "Samagoal".

"Ally is the complete striker," says Genk's assistant coach, Jos Daerden. "He's extremely quick, he's clever in his movement, he can hold the ball up and is strong in the air. He makes scoring goals look easy. He really is maturing."

Samatta does not merely owe his popularity in Belgium to his ability as a serial converter of chances. He is a likeable character too, softly spoken, genial and modest. He is happy to admit that he must work on his weaker left foot, but in his down-to-earth attitude he personifies the "all for one, one for all" spirit of the current squad. "Personally I'm very happy here, but I'm especially proud of this team," says Samatta. "We're like a train no one can stop."

While he still has some way to go to become a household name on the European circuit, he inevitably enjoys a much higher profile in Africa.

Back home in Tanzania he is an absolute idol – "Everyone wants to meet me and chat when I'm there," he admits – and during five excellent years with TP Mazembe he developed into a continent-wide star, figuring prominently in the club's conquest of the 2015 CAF Champions League and claiming first prize in that year's ballot for the best African-based player.

Despite recently extending a contract with Genk that will take him through until the summer of 2021, the chances of him fulfilling those terms are slim at best. Marseille, who narrowly lost out to Genk in the race for his signature three years ago, may be ready to pursue him once more, while several Bundesliga clubs are rumoured to be interested. And if a Premier League side was to come calling, he surely would not say no.

> "Ally is the complete striker...he makes scoring goals look easy"
> **Genk assistant coach Jos Daerden**

Like all Tanzanian football lovers he sees the Premier League as the holiest of sites. Growing up, he was a fan of Arsenal's Thierry Henry and these days he cites Tottenham Hotspur and England front-man Harry Kane as an awe-inspiring point of reference.

The one-time street player from Dar es Salaam may be within touching distance of his Premier League dream.

Nick Bidwell

Gonzalo Martinez

USA-bound Libertadores winner voted best player in the Americas

Every year, Uruguayan newspaper *El Pais* organises a survey to crown the best player of the Americas. The 2018 winner of this prestigious award, with 41 per cent of the vote, was Argentinian attacking midfielder Gonzalo Martinez, who was a key figure in River Plate's eventful Libertadores Cup triumph.

But although the 25-year-old will be staying in the Americas this year, he is still moving on, taking the long trip north to join Atlanta United in MLS.

Atlanta have established themselves in next to no time with a model based on the acquisition of South American players. Indeed, their Venezuelan striker Josef Martinez came fourth in the *El Pais* survey with seven per cent of the vote.

From an MLS point of view, there is much to celebrate in the fact that a new club can attract the man acclaimed as the best player in South America.

But for those south of the border this is not such a positive development, with yet another destination emerging to whisk away South America's finest. The most promising go to Europe at an ever earlier age, and now the USA has joined China and the Middle East as an attraction for those on the next rung down on the ladder.

Playing wide on either flank or behind the strikers, with his pace and a fine left foot showcased to good effect, Martinez blossomed under the guidance of River Plate coach Marcelo Gallardo in the final few months of last year, winning a couple of Argentina caps in September.

However, he is already at an age at which the top European clubs commonly start to lose interest.

This is an observation that rings true for the 2017 winner of the *El Pais* award, Gremio playmaker Luan, who has had a frustrating time since carrying the club to the Libertadores title little more than a year ago. That year's Club World Cup game against Real Madrid was not a great advert for his capacity to dominate games at the highest level and he was barely considered for Brazil's World Cup squad. Any interest that came in from Europe was from the periphery rather than the centre.

Luan stayed with Gremio but had a disappointing time in 2018 and at the end of the year it appeared that some of the club's directors would have been happy to swap him for a much older player, 33-year-old Thiago Neves. Luan is not 26 until March, but already it is clear that he faces an uphill battle to be considered a genuine world-class player.

Similar things might be said about 2016 *El Pais* winner, Colombian centre-forward Miguel Borja, 2015 winner Carlos Sanchez, a Uruguayan midfielder, and Teo Gutierrez, the Colombian striker who won the award in 2014. The 2013 winner Ronaldinho was already a shadow of his former self – leaving Neymar, winner in 2011 and 2012, as the last *El Pais* winner with a top-level future in Europe.

Neymar was a young man on the way up when he won. The subsequent years have showcased lesser talents of a continent that is losing its star attractions.

Tim Vickery

Award...winning the *El Pais* trophy

Marcelo Bielsa

Leeds manager provides an enthralling rebuttal of 'Spygate' claims

Advantage...Leeds' Pontus Jansson beats Richard Keogh of Derby County

The rumour spread quickly around social media. Marcelo Bielsa had called a press conference for 5pm at Leeds United's training ground. It could only mean one thing: Bielsa, in the light of the "Spygate" controversy, would be resigning.

The brilliant coach with a history of abrupt departures – Lille, Lazio and Marseille in recent years – was at it again. It would be a typical Bielsa response to the complaint of Derby County boss Frank Lampard that a "spy" from Leeds had been spotted, armed with a pair of binoculars, observing his team's training session ahead of their crucial Championship match.

However, rather than announcing his resignation, Bielsa treated the assembled media to a presentation of his coaching ideals and the benefits of thorough pre-match preparation.

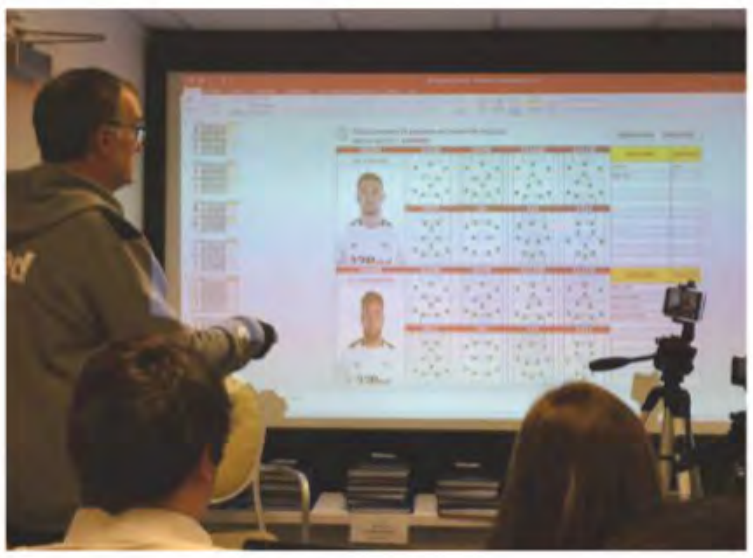
The former Argentina and Chile boss admitted a member of his staff had spied on Derby but that he'd also spied on all his rivals, stating: "We've watched all the opponents before we played them."

He also took full responsibility for the incident, saying: "I've already said I'm the one responsible. The club is not responsible whatsoever. The person who did it followed my orders."

He may have offended English football's curious moral code but what he did was not illegal. "Of course if you observe something without the permission of those being observed we call it spying. I can't say that is the right thing," he added. "I did it because it did not contravene a specific norm.

"I want to be judged for my intentions. In my eyes I am not guilty. I feel I have done something that is not unlawful or with bad intentions."

Presentation... in-depth analysis



Bielsa used the example of Derby to demonstrate how his staff prepare information on their opponents. A group of 20 employees are involved with preparations, with each person taking four hours to watch one aspect of a single game.

One presentation slide featured a table explaining the four different systems and the players used by Derby 90 per cent of the time. Another document showed how all of Derby's systems had been analysed. Another examined every player and each position they had played in.

"You have around 20 people who create a volume of information," he explained. "Not all of which is necessary. So why? Because we feel guilty if we don't work enough, it reduces anxiety ...and in my case because I'm stupid enough to allow myself this behaviour."

It should not be forgotten that Leeds' 2-0 victory over Derby extended a lead at the top of the Championship that has been achieved with the same set of young players who finished 13th last season – and in some style, too.

The tactical landscape of England's second tier may be vastly different to Spain, where his Athletic Bilbao side will be remembered for their exhilarating run to the Europa League Final, but Bielsa's ideas are resonating in a positive manner with the Leeds players, even if the notoriously reluctant interviewee still requires the services of a translator to communicate with the media.

> "I want to be judged for my intentions. In my eyes I am not guilty"

On and off the pitch, Bielsa is helping to transform the fortunes of a club tainted by the "Dirty Leeds" tag for decades but now daring to dream of a brighter future back in the top flight.

His, obsessiveness, honesty and self-deprecating charm has proved a breath of fresh air to English observers unaccustomed to the unconventional ways of "*El Loco*". This is a man who once admitted that the referee was right to send him off in a 3-0 Copa America defeat to Colombia in which his centre-forward, Martin Palermo, had missed three penalties.

Far from ending Marcelo Bielsa's time in English football, Spygate has only enhanced his reputation.

Gavin Hamilton

Vinicius Junior

Brazilian teenager thriving in Madrid after uncertain start

It's four years since Real Madrid made a *galactico* signing, paying €75million for Monaco's James Rodriguez. Since then they have missed out on Neymar and Kylian Mbappe, unable to compete with Paris Saint-Germain's Qatar-enhanced financial clout, while Belgium's Eden Hazard has so far opted to stay with Chelsea.

Instead, president Florentino Perez has concentrated on signing young talent, the most high profile of which has been Brazilian teenager Vinicius Junior.

The strategy stems partly from an obsession with another Brazilian, Neymar, who Madrid let slip through their fingers after he trained with them as a 14-year-old. He could have been their Lionel Messi – the South American talent who came through the youth ranks. Instead, he was whisked away to Barcelona and the rest is history.

After losing Neymar to Barca, Madrid re-doubled their efforts in unearthing the next Neymar by investing heavily in a Brazilian scouting network. Vinicius Junior is the first product of those labours, albeit an expensive one, having been signed from Flamengo, as a 16-year-old, for €45m in 2017.

Vinicius Junior finally arrived in Madrid in June 2018 and made all the right noises about fighting for a place in the first team, saying: "I can do everything I did at Flamengo, and do better.

"I will show I am ready to play and show everything possible as quickly as I can. I know the adaptation will not be easy, but I am ready to do whatever is necessary. I am coming from Flamengo, another club with a lot of pressure. The people around me are here to help me with this. I never think of failing, just succeeding, winning as much as possible."

> "He is brave, he takes players on and destroys defences in a way that we see less and less these days"
>
> **Real Madrid coach Santiago Solari**

But Madrid's incoming coach Julen Lopetegui dispatched him to Castilla – Real's reserve side who play in Spain's third tier – and debate raged in Madrid as to when the youngster should be given his chance in the first team.

The crucial factor proved to be the sacking of Lopetegui in October. Santiago Solari – Lopetegui's replacement until the end of the season at least – worked with the youngster at Castilla and has had no qualms about introducing him into the first team.

Solari gave him his first start in his first game as caretaker coach, a 4-0 Spanish Cup win over Melilla. Since then the Brazilian has impressed with his speed and intelligence, culminating in a brilliant performance in a 3-0 cup win against Leganes, in which he scored Madrid's third goal with an impressive volley.

"Hope is called Vinicius," declared *Marca*. Solari was equally impressed, saying afterwards: "He is brave, he takes players on and destroys defences in a way that we see less and less these days."

The 18-year-old remains a raw talent whose progress will have to be carefully managed, but as former Spain midfielder Gaizka Mendieta says: "The way Vinicius is playing for Real Madrid he has to be in the team before anyone."

John Holmesdale

Goal...celebrating against Leganes

Gerard Pique

Barcelona defender buys fifth-tier FC Andorra

If Barcelona are "*mes que un club*" (more than a club, according to their motto), then their defender Gerard Pique is fast becoming more than a footballer. Increasingly looking to life after his playing career finishes, the 31-year-old recently bought a controlling stake in FC Andorra, who play in the regional Primera Catalana in Spain's fifth tier.

"The General Assembly of FC Andorra has unanimously approved the transmission of its assets in favour of an Andorran company jointly managed by different investors, including Kosmos," said a statement from the company of which Pique is CEO and president. "Kosmos welcomes the decision made by the club. The company adds this project to its global portfolio linked to sports, media and entertainment ventures."

Signing... Adria Vilanova

It should come as no surprise that Pique, installed as president of the club, has ambitions plans. His lawyer father, Joan Pique, will be a director and he has persuaded Lionel Messi and Cesc Fabregas to join as investors in the project.

Former Barca players Gabri and Albert Jorquera will form a new-look coaching staff and new players signed include Adria Vilanova – the son of late Barca coach Tito Vilanova – who is a former Masia academy graduate and latterly with Mallorca B.

Pique, through Kosmos, has also launched business ventures in esports, video games, eyeglasses, isotonic drinks and organic hamburgers. While team-mates were on beaches and yachts in summer 2017, Pique was taking summer classes at Harvard University as part of his studies for an MBA.

> While team-mates were on beaches and yachts in summer 2017, Pique was taking summer classes at Harvard University

Coach...Gabri

It all raises questions as to how long Pique, who turns 32 on February 2, will continue playing for Barcelona, though coach Ernesto Valverde is not concerned that Pique's extra-curricular activities could prove a distraction from matters on the pitch, insisting: "It's a good thing, it keeps him focused."

There is a suggestion that FC Andorra could act as a feeder club for Barcelona and connections between the two could extend to beyond players and coaches if Pique's long-rumoured plans to contest the Barcelona presidency reach fruition.

The next elections are scheduled for 2021 but candidates must have spent a minimum of two years outside of the club's employment, so a run in 2027 is more likely – especially if, by then, Pique has shown he is more than a footballer.

John Holmesdale

BAYERN MUNICH v LIVERPOOL

Bayern Munich

Problems mounting for Bundesliga champions

At a time of non-stop snowfall in Bavaria, Bayern Munich could well end up in the Champions League deep freeze after their clash of the titans with Jurgen Klopp's re-energised Liverpool.

Usually so dominant across the board – reigning supreme in the Bundesliga for the last six years and Champions League semi-finalists in six of the past seven seasons – Bayern are currently in one of their once-in-a-blue moon slumps, trailing Borussia Dortmund in the domestic title race and beset by all manner of problems. Their morale is flaky, their air of invincibility punctured.

Stories of dressing-room unrest abound. There are reports that a number of players consider coach Niko Kovac to be out of his depth at the Allianz Arena and there are gripes about excessive first-team rotation and strictly rationed playing opportunities. There is frustration with Kovac's alleged tactical inflexibility and a lack of attacking fine-tuning. There is talk of inner-sanctum moles feeding the German media with tasty titbits.

This is what happens when a behemoth hits the skids: solidarity suffers and everyone runs for cover.

In his first job at a big club, Kovac has undoubtedly made mistakes. But he does not deserve to carry the can alone. With the benefit of hindsight, the Bayern board should have rejuvenated an ageing squad far earlier, while the attitude of a number of players has been somewhat less than exemplary.

Eintracht Frankfurt supervisory board chairman Wolfgang Steubing, who worked with Kovac at the Waldstadion, recently used the newspaper *Bild* to point the finger of blame squarely at the Bayern squad.

"Astonishingly, they have not taken on board what Kovac has demanded of them: namely the need to prioritise the right results ahead of everything else," said Steubing. "They are money-grabbers." Harsh words indeed.

Bayern are not only struggling as a collective unit; individually, many of their key performers have regressed. Midfield enforcer Javi Martinez has faded out of the first-team picture; left-back David

Travel bug...Liverpool lost in Belgrade to Red Star (in stripes) in the group stage

Alaba is not nearly as effective going forward as he used to be; frequent injuries have undermined Colombian attacking midfielder James Rodriguez; while veteran wingers Arjen Robben and Franck Ribery have clearly lost a step.

And in an extremely worrying further development, central defenders Mats Hummels and Jerome Boateng no longer appear to be the last word in rock-solid authority. Even class-act keeper Manuel Neuer has let his standards slip – so under-par, in fact, that he was omitted from the best custodian category in *Kicker* magazine's mid-term player rankings. Distinctly unfamiliar territory for the Bayern skipper, this was the first time in over a decade that he had not made the cut on sporting – rather than injury – grounds.

"The decision of the *Kicker* editorial team was a courageous but correct one," believes former German international goalkeeper Toni Schumacher. "In recent years, Manuel has raised the goalkeeping bar. He is thus expected to always be at the top of his game.

"'Normal' displays are not enough. Average performances won't do."

Always as good a way as any to gauge the mood at Bayern is to note the state of mind of Ribery. When all is well in the Frenchman's world you can be sure that the Bayern group are in good spirits. If the 35-year-old is grumbling, the reverse applies – and right now, the extrovert Gallic wide-man is not at all happy with his lot, riled by a heavy club fine for a string of expletive-laden tweets.

Ribery was responding to criticism after posting a video of himself enjoying a steak sprinkled with gold at a celebrity restaurant in Dubai, the site of Bayern's mid-term training camp. "He used words that Bayern Munich cannot accept, ones he should not employ as a Bayern player and role model," declared club director of sport Hasan Salihamidzic.

Not that any of this should see Bayern written off as Champions League no-hopers. They have both the talent and the experience, and with their backs to the wall they will be determined to revert to all-conquering type.

> **"They have not taken on board what Kovac has demanded of them...they are money-grabbers"**
> Eintracht Frankfurt's Wolfgang Steubing on Bayern

The role of underdog will certainly suit them against Liverpool. Kovac is an ace counter-attacking strategist and he will be happy to lure the Premier League side forward, patiently waiting for the right moment to step up and counterpunch.

To get through, Bayern will need greater strength in central defence and better prevention of crosses, a solid shift from the deep-lying midfield pairing – probably Leon Goretzka and Thiago Alcantara – and the continued sharpness of Robert Lewandowski, who racked up eight goals in the group phase.

"I think it's absolutely the case that other teams don't want to play us," says the upbeat Kovac. Now for the acid test.

Nick Bidwell

Moody...Franck Ribery is far from happy at present

Liverpool

Reason to be cheerful
Striker Mo Salah is returning to top form after injuries restricted his impact.

Reason to be fearful
They suffered three away defeats out of three in the group stage.

ROMA v PORTO

Roma

Reason to be cheerful
Teen sensation Nicolo Zaniolo is a revelation as the advanced playmaker.

Reason to be fearful
The long list of underachieving signings, particularly keeper Robin Olsen, schemer Javier Pastore and winger Justin Kluivert.

Sensation... Nicolo Zaniolo

Porto

Reason to be cheerful
Sky-high morale as a result of staying unbeaten in the group phase and winning 18 consecutive games in all competitions.

Reason to be fearful
The recent re-signing of veteran stopper Pepe does not make a lot of sense. Eder Militao and Felipe are doing just fine at the heart of the defence.

Ideal...Kenny Tete (right) and Lyon took four points from Manchester City

LYON v BARCELONA

Lyon

Talented youngsters could hurt Barcelona

If Barcelona know what is good for them they would be well advised not to harbour any complacent thoughts when they go toe-to-toe with Lyon and their cast of bright young things.

The French side are the most awkward of opponents to prepare for, the sort of unpredictable team that pulls out all the stops on the big occasion but forgets its cues in routine encounters. Strong enough to deservedly take four points out of six from Manchester City in the group phase, but then regularly letting themselves down in Ligue 1.

Needless to say, such inconsistency is incredibly frustrating for fans at the Groupama Stadium. Without the Jekyll-and-Hyde act, the gap to domestic league leaders Paris Saint-Germain would be much reduced.

Lyon's roller-coaster tendencies are not hard to figure out. With an average age of just 23 years and eight months, they suffer moments of immaturity and errors are bound to occur. But tactical considerations also come into the equation. Basically a counter-attacking team, they only truly thrive when facing sides who play open, attacking football. Force them to take the initiative against a team which hunkers down in defence and they struggle for solutions.

Pep Guardiola's City were perfect for Lyon and an equally expansive Barcelona will have the same conundrum of how to force the issue without leaving themselves vulnerable to intermittent counter-attacking raids of deadly intent.

Both in midfield and further forward, Lyon have creativity and firepower. With elegant schemer Houssem Aouar, dynamic box-to-box operative Tanguy Ndombele, crafty playmaker Nabil Fekir, maverick front-runner Memphis Depay and underrated box of tricks Bertrand Traore, they have wall-to-wall potential game-changers. What a pity Fekir will miss the first leg through suspension, though. He will be badly missed.

"It's a complicated draw, but we'll just have to get on with it," says Lyon coach Bruno Genesio. "While we accept that Barcelona are favourites, it won't stop us giving everything we have.

"But we are more than capable. We proved it against Manchester City; we'll take heart from what we did against them. Because of the Guardiola factor, City and Barcelona are comparable.

"Collectively, we'll need to be 150 per cent right to have a hope. We must have solid plans all over the pitch. You can have a plan for Messi too, but he's a genius – he could well ignore it. If we simply defend against a team like Barcelona we'll definitely go out.

"What we have to do is make them uncomfortable, force them into situations they are not used to."

> **"While we accept that Barcelona are favourites, it won't stop us giving everything we have"**
>
> Lyon coach Bruno Genesio

This could be the last gala fixture for the current OL configuration as several of their star names are hot transfer property and such are the economic realities that club president Jean-Michel Aulas may have to cash in. Fekir, who came within a whisker of moving to Liverpool last year, has been linked to Chelsea, Bayern Munich and Real Madrid, while several

Worry...Gerard Pique

Barcelona

Reason to be cheerful
Messi, Messi and Messi.
Reason to be fearful
Their tendency to let in soft goals, exemplified by past-his-prime central defender Gerard Pique.

In and out... Eriksen (right) and Kane

TOTTENHAM H v BOR DORTMUND

Tottenham Hotspur

Reason to be cheerful
The 24-carat creative genius that is Christian Eriksen.
Reason to be fearful
An ankle injury is set to rule Harry Kane out of both games.

Borussia Dortmund

Reason to be cheerful
An injury-free Marco Reus. The team's livewire attacking midfielder was recently voted the best player in the "Autumn Championship" by his fellow players in the Bundesliga.
Reason to be fearful
Against teams who sit deep and refuse to come out and play, Dortmund are not at all comfortable.

Best...Marco Reus

Premier League big-hitters have Aouar and Ndombele in their sights.

Lyon will take encouragement from one of their greatest achievements in European football: their elimination of Real Madrid in a Champions League round-of-16 tie back in 2010.

"Lyon are a form team right now in the Champions League," says the ever-combative Aulas. "I wouldn't like to be in the shoes of those up against us."

Pure bravado or justified confidence?

Nick Bidwell

MANCHESTER UNITED v PARIS SAINT-GERMAIN

Manchester United

Stand-in Solskjaer lifts the handbrake

Jose Mourinho has left the building and Manchester United have turned to a former favourite son to lift the gloom around Old Trafford. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, on secondment from Norwegian club Molde, was the surprise choice to replace Mourinho, who was sacked within days of a meek defeat to Liverpool.

Mourinho and United had always been an unlikely alliance, a marriage of convenience that suited both parties. The Glazer family and their representative in Manchester, chief executive Ed Woodward, tolerated his pragmatic approach while the results were positive. But when that changed – the defeat by Liverpool left United 19 points behind the Premier League leaders – the Glazers acted to end Mourinho's tenure.

Woodward's mind may also have been focused by the Champions League draw, which paired United with a free-scoring Paris Saint-Germain, who are once again running away with Ligue 1 and have their sights set on finally achieving success on the European stage.

Exit Mourinho, albeit with a reported £22.5million pay-off. Enter Solskjaer, the hero of United's 1999 Champions League triumph against Bayern Munich in Barcelona but an extremely unlikely saviour more than 19 years later.

The 45-year-old's only previous experience of Premier League management was a short stint at Cardiff City, where he failed to stop the rot, overseeing a relegation amid claims of naive tactics and unimpressive signings from his native Norway.

Cardiff's run of poor form continued in the Championship and he departed in September 2015, a manager filed under "promising but flawed". He retreated to the comfort of Molde, where he was quietly rebuilding his reputation when the surprise call came from United.

For the critics of the Glazers'

Hero...Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was a fans' favourite at Old Trafford

Dangerman... Kylian Mbappe

ownership – and there are many – Solskjaer's appointment provided proof of Woodward's lack of football knowledge. The need for a sporting director, a heavyweight footballing presence on the board, was clear.

Yet amid talk of Mauricio Pochettino, Gareth Southgate and other possible long-term replacements, Solskjaer has quietly got on with the job.

The Norwegian won his first six games in charge – including a 1-0 victory at Wembley over Pochettino's Tottenham Hotspur. Admittedly, the first five opponents – Cardiff, Huddersfield Town, Bournemouth, Newcastle United and Reading – could hardly have been easier. But a much sterner test lay in playing Spurs at Wembley. And now PSG will provide a rigorous test of Solskjaer's tactical acumen.

Crucial to United's upturn in fortunes has been a change in approach from the caretaker boss. Mourinho's defensive handbrake has been ditched and United's players have thrived in a more attacking approach – none more so than Paul Pogba, a World Cup winner back in July but shackled by Mourinho's tactics and unnerved by his prickly personality.

"We encourage him to go forward, we encourage him to track back and make recovery runs, but when you've got the vision that Paul has...you should release him forward," says Solskjaer.

"Paul's one of the best midfielders in the world going forward. And then you have Ander [Herrera] and Nemanja [Matic]. The energy and the balance that they give us helps Paul to go forward."

Under Solskjaer, United's training ground is a happier place and there have been hints Alex Ferguson has been a regular visitor. Now 77 and recovering from last year's brain haemorrhage, ex United boss Ferguson was apparently by Solskjaer's side watching Giuseppe Rossi, who is back training with the club where he was once an apprentice as he seeks a new employer.

Ferguson's former assistant, Mike Phelan, has also been added to Solskjaer's backroom staff.

Accidentally, United may have stumbled across the long-term replacement for Ferguson, after the sackings of David Moyes, Louis Van Gaal and Mourinho. But Solskjaer plays such suggestions with a straight bat.

"I'm here for six months, then I'll take a holiday," says the Norwegian. "I'm not thinking about anything else."

The longer-term issue of a sporting director and a permanent managerial appointment will have to wait for the moment as PSG are the focus of short-term attentions.

United have the attacking talent – and now the mentality – to trouble the French champions' defence. But United's own backline has been fragile for some time and only heroics from keeper David De Gea saved them against Tottenham.

Now Solskjaer could prove to be the saviour of United's season.

John Holmesdale

> **"I'm here for six months, then I'll take a holiday. I'm not thinking about anything else"**
>
> Ole Gunnar Solskjaer

Paris Saint-Germain

Reason to be cheerful
Jet-propelled forward Kylian Mbappe spells danger every time he is on the ball.

Reason to be fearful
The rearguard frailties they displayed in a French League Cup loss to Guingamp, especially the three penalties conceded in one half.

ATLETICO MADRID v JUVENTUS

Atletico Madrid

Reason to be cheerful
Koke's exceptional form in midfield. Coach Diego Simeone recently described him as "tactically amazing".

Reason to be fearful
Will central defensive pillar Diego Godin be fully focused after reportedly agreeing to move to Internazionale in the summer?

Exceptional...Koke

Juventus

Reason to be cheerful
Their watertight defensive disposition with 15 competitive clean sheets in the first half of the season.

Reason to be fearful
The immense distraction of the Cristiano Ronaldo rape investigation. Las Vegas police have requested a sample of his DNA.

Watertight...Juve defenders Leonardo Bonucci (left) and Giorgio Chiellini

Young blood... celebrating a goal against AEK

AJAX v REAL MADRID

Ajax

Youngsters bring hope

Ajax are back in the knockout stage of the Champions League for the first time in 13 years and their progress has coincided with the emergence of the latest group of home-grown youngsters who are once again being courted by Europe's richest clubs.

Elegant central midfielder Frenkie De Jong, 21, and Matthijs De Ligt, centre-back and captain at the age of 19, have been the focus of much of the attention, and they are at the heart of a team brimming with young talent. Other first-team regulars include midfielder Donny Van de Beek, Brazilian forward David Neres and Moroccan full-back Noussair Mazraoui. All are 21, as is Kasper Dolberg, the Danish striker who is getting back to the form shown when he emerged in Ajax's run to the 2017 Europa League Final. Tricky Moroccan winger Hakim Ziyech seems positively ancient at the age of 25.

De Jong is the poster boy of the current side and Paris Saint-Germain have emerged as the favourites for his signature, ahead of Barcelona and Manchester City. The asking price is likely to be north of €70million but any deal will not happen until the summer after De Jong declared his intention to remain in Amsterdam until then.

"I am certainly not leaving this winter," he says. "I am 100 per cent staying until the summer. I don't know what other people are doing, but personally I would like it if the whole group stay together.

"We have had a fairly decent first half to the season. The atmosphere in the group is very good and we have a lot of quality, so I would be disappointed if people left."

De Ligt, meanwhile, has been linked with Barcelona and Bayern Munich, and Ajax are unlikely to stand in his way. As technical director Marc Overmars concedes: "Players used to stay at Ajax until they were 24, 25 or 26, but that's history now. It's over. Now, when they're 20 or 21, the best talent leaves."

The counterbalance to the emerging youthful talent has been the form of senior players signed this summer.

Serb attacking midfielder Dusan Tadic has been a revelation following his £10m transfer from Southampton, while Daley Blind has returned from Manchester United to bring experience and bite to either the backline or midfield. And although no longer a regular, striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar provides excellent back-up for Dolberg.

Although Austrian defender Max Wober was sold to Sevilla in the January transfer window, a replacement had already been signed in the form of Argentinian defender Lisandro Magallan from Boca Juniors.

Erik Ten Hag has been in charge for

Confident... Vinicius Junior

Credit...Ralf Fahrmann

SCHALKE v MANCHESTER CITY

Schalke

Reason to be cheerful
Keeper and skipper Ralf Fahrmann is arguably the only *Gelsenkirchener* to emerge with any credit from the pre-Christmas phase.

Reason to be fearful
The inexplicable decision to allow veteran centre-back Naldo to leave for Monaco in the latest transfer window is a huge loss to the dressing room.

Real Madrid

Reason to be cheerful
Fast-improving young Brazilian striker Vinicius Junior is talented as well as ultra confident.

Reason to be fearful
A seemingly never-ending run of injuries at the Bernabeu – there were 50 in the 2018 calendar year.

Manchester City

Reason to be cheerful
The prospect of flying winger Leroy Sane wreaking havoc on his return to his old Ruhr stomping ground.

Reason to be fearful
Fernandinho apart, City have little grit in midfield.

> **"Players used to stay at Ajax until they were 24, 25 or 26... now, when they're 20 or 21, the best talent leaves"**
> The club's technical director, Marc Overmars

just over a year now and he has brought Ajax closer to challenging the domestic dominance of PSV. In the Champions League, his side only just missed out on topping their group. Leading Bayern 2-1 until the 87th minute of their last game, they conceded two late goals before levelling the match at 3-3 with a 95th-minute equaliser from Argentinian defender Nicolas Tagliafico.

The confidence gained from pushing Bayern all the way will be useful when they face Real Madrid, but these Champions League games could be the last featuring the talented De Jong and De Ligt in Ajax colours.

John Holmesdale

Return...Leroy Sane faces his former club

L.F.C.
BETVICT

Facetoface

SADIO MANE

"Our best is still to come"

The Liverpool striker reflects on his team-mates, the Premier League title race and this summer's African Nations Cup

Last summer, Senegal became the first side to be knocked out of the World Cup via FIFA's fairplay points system. When you look back on it now, what is your overriding emotion?

There isn't one emotion. It is mixed. Firstly, I have to say it was the realisation of my dream to play for Senegal at a World Cup. It obviously didn't end the way we wanted it to, or how we expected it to, but it remains one of the best moments in my career. It came so soon after playing on the biggest stage in club football, which was also something I had wanted so much since I was a very young boy. I managed to score in both the Champions League Final and at the World Cup, but, yes, there is a feeling of what might have been because it didn't quite work out the way I had hoped for both my club and my country. It was a strange situation the way we were knocked out. The players, the staff – our whole country – were desperate for us to reach the knockout stage and we thought we had the squad to do it. We gave everything, so to go out because we received more yellow cards than Japan was so tough for us to take. In the end we were all just left massively disappointed. It was a World Cup where there were some big surprises and who knows what we could have achieved if we'd made it past that first step. We have to learn from the experience and we are determined to make the nation even more proud in the future. It was 16 years since Senegal were last in a World Cup, so we must make sure it isn't such a long wait again and do everything to get to Qatar.

How do you assess the level of African football right now? It was the first time since 1982 that an African side didn't make it into the knockout stage at the World Cup. There were five teams at the finals but they all fell at the first hurdle...

I don't really want to analyse why other countries didn't get through their groups, but, like I say, we

Pals...with Liverpool team-mate Mohamed Salah

were very unlucky. We won our first game and then drew with Japan. They were a better side than some people were giving them credit for. They beat Colombia and then gave Belgium a real scare in the last 16. What happened is part of football. You can play well but luck has a role too. It wasn't to be for us, unfortunately. As for African football, it is complicated. A lot of players are based in different countries all over Europe. This isn't a new thing but you can sometimes go many months without seeing more than one or two faces from the group. It's not an excuse but something that makes it that bit harder to gel perfectly when we do meet up for matches.

You got very upset following your last game for Senegal – a 1-0 win against Equatorial Guinea. Can you explain your feelings at that point as some people have suggested it was a result of being booed...

It wasn't such a big thing. I just wanted to do better for my country. It has always been the most special part of being a professional footballer for me. When something isn't going the way you hope it is frustrating. I always look to make the same sacrifices on the pitch when I play for Senegal or Liverpool, but it can't always go perfectly. I try to stay positive but it does mean a lot to me being involved with the national side. It made me the player I am today. Sometimes it can be very emotional if things don't quite go to plan, but people will always talk and find other reasons for it. The truth was that I simply wanted to do better and didn't produce the level I expected of myself on the day.

Do you feel the burden of expectation when appearing for your country? Because you play for a famous team like Liverpool at club level, fans in Senegal expect a lot of you don't they...

Of course. Everybody is waiting for something special to happen, either for me to score or assist. They see what happens at Liverpool and expect me to deliver the same. It's obviously different at international level. There are other factors, such as different types of players and not getting much time to train and work together before heading into matches, but I know how to handle this pressure. I'm not a young player any more. I have experience and want to be important for my country and my team-mates. I just try to do what I have always done: to be a big threat in the opposition half. I am training all the time to get better and better so I can help my team. I don't allow any criticism or negative talk to get into my head. I'm my own biggest critic and set high standards for myself.

You are great friends with Mohamed Salah, but when it comes to awards such as CAF African Footballer of Year you are inevitably up against him. You've finished second to him in the past two years – does this create a rivalry or is it a case of spurring each other

on to be even better?
You'd love me to say there is [a rivalry] wouldn't you? [laughs]. The media seem to expect there to be, but I can honestly say it isn't even a competition for us. I think you can see that in our relationship both on and off the pitch. Everyone is trying to do all that we can for the success of Liverpool – it's not just about us. We represent the club and the city to the best of our ability and it's something we enjoy. Mo loves Liverpool just like I do and he's been sensational since he joined the club. We just want to win trophies with this team. That is the priority. I know other players in the world have a rivalry going for individual awards, but for us it isn't something we think about too much. If we do talk, we have a laugh about it and if one of us ends up winning it is a happy moment. At the end of it all, the fact we get shortlisted for any individual awards can only be good for Liverpool and our countries because it means we are doing something right.

What would it mean for you to win the CAF Footballer of the Year award at some point in your career, though?
It would be a huge honour. I try not to focus on individual accolades, but when I think back to my childhood in Senegal I remember El Hadji Diouf winning it twice [in 2001 and 2002] and he was one of my big heroes. If I could follow in his footsteps and win it I would be so proud.

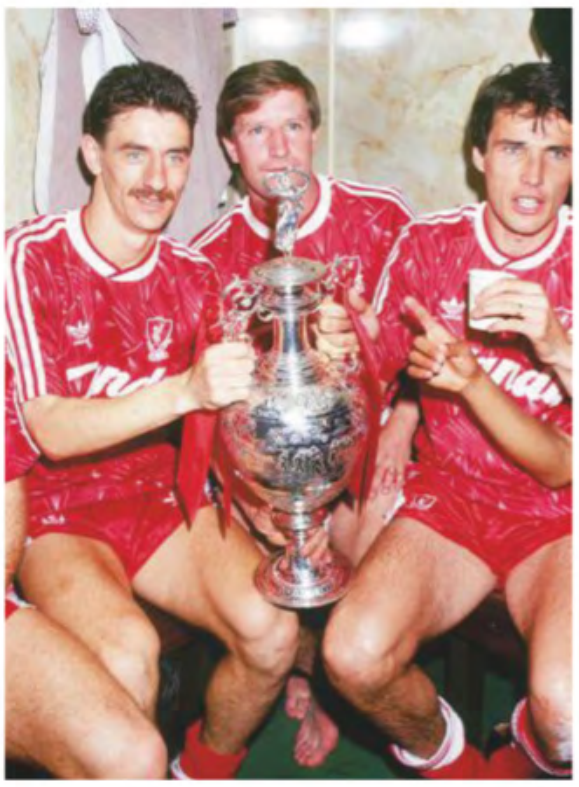
Looking ahead to the African Nations Cup, what did you make of Cameroon being stripped of the hosting rights?
It is very sad for Cameroon. It's gone to Egypt now, but I didn't actually mind where we played. The main thing is that the pitches are good and we are able to play the style of football we want to. It is going to be an exciting tournament. When I heard the news that it was moving to the summer I was so happy. It's not only good for me, but for Liverpool and my team-mates too. It's very important to have one focus at a time and it used to disrupt the club season in the winter. The tournament has also been expanded to 24 teams so I think you could say that the winner is going to be the best African team of all time. In the past there have been some shocks, with two or three of the biggest teams not qualifying, but now it has the larger format there are no excuses. If Senegal are going to win their first Nations Cup, this would be a great time to do it. We would be the best ever.

Determined...Mane believes Liverpool are even stronger this term than last season

Do you feel you have some unfinished business in the Nations Cup? Injury affected you in 2015 and you missed a penalty in the quarter-final shoot-out in 2017...
Of course. In 2015 I was halfway through the season with Southampton and I injured my calf. When I went to the tournament I was not 100 per cent. Two years later I started well in the group stage but it didn't end well for me personally with the penalty. That is football. Hopefully, this year it will be different because the Nations Cup is special to me. Senegal reached the Final in 2002 and that is a big memory for me as a kid. That was the moment I started to really focus on the national team. Millions of people in Senegal were inspired by how our team played in that competition. It is one of the best stories in our country's history. Even now, that is a big motivation for us, to go one better and finally win this trophy for all of the people in Senegal. It would be incredible.

At club level with Liverpool you are part

History...Liverpool were last league champions in 1990



we could have done more with some of our performances. In many ways, this is good for the club. We are very competitive but know there is even more to come, for sure. The season is long, so we were always calm about it. In many ways, the team is stronger and we have produced some very mature performances. We work hard every day to be at our best and hopefully we will hit our top form when it really matters most.

Tell us about your relationship with Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp...
He's one of the best coaches in the world but I think one of his secrets is that he is just an incredible person. He is someone who is very close to the players. We have a strong bond with him and he just has a way of inspiring you with his passion. All the boys love him and so do the fans. We are all improving and progressing under him. He is amazing for the club. I can see how my game has gone to an extra level with him and hope to keep working with him for many more years to come.

> "Everyone is trying to do all that we can for the success of Liverpool...we just want to win trophies with this team"

of one of in one of the best front threes in the world. Did you work on that link-up or has it just clicked?
I think it just happened naturally. When you have players like Bobby [Firmino] and Mo [Salah] they just make everything easier. We just seem to instinctively know each other's movements and I think you can see that we enjoy playing together. We know we maybe didn't start this season quite as strongly as we were playing last year. We were at an extremely high level, but you can see it is coming. We want to get even better and score even more goals. Our best is still to come.

Liverpool made their best-ever start to a league season and are in the last 16 of the Champions League. You have to go back to 1990 for the last time the Reds won the title. What would it mean to you to be in the side that finally ends that wait?
I can't wait to lift a trophy with Liverpool. I know the fans are desperate for us to win the Premier League. It would be an amazing moment for the club. It has been far too long for a team the size of Liverpool. We believe we are heading in the right direction, but there are some very tough rivals – [Manchester] City were unbelievable last season and are very strong again – but why not? We are going to keep pushing and try to make everyone who loves the club very proud. We heard what some of the media were saying about us not starting off by playing as fast and exciting as last year, and we felt we weren't at our best ourselves at times. The results have been there but we know

Dream...playing for Senegal at the World Cup last summer

You were linked with Real Madrid last summer. Did you consider a move or was it always the case that you were going to sign a new long-term deal with Liverpool?
Speculation is part of football. You just learn to live with it and not take it too seriously. All I can say is that my only concern is Liverpool. Mo, Bobby...it seemed like everyone was signing contracts and they were saying: "Hey, Sadio, when are you going to sign?" I said to each of them: "Don't worry bro, I will sign." And what did I do? I signed...so they are pleased now! [laughs]. I'm very happy here and I think people are happy with me too. We want to write our names alongside the many great ones in the story of this club. Hopefully it's just the beginning of something special.

Interview by Paul Hassall

Facetoface

LIONEL MESSI

"The Champions League is unique, special: the most beautiful competition I have played in"

The 2018 Golden Shoe winner discusses everything from Ousmane Dembele and Barca's academy, to his team's defensive troubles and family life

One more year and a fifth ESM Golden Shoe. How do you feel? Are you not tired of winning?
It's a nice prize for recognition and that's for everyone. It is a prize for the team, just as when a goalkeeper wins the Zamora [a trophy for the keeper with the lowest goals-to-games ratio in La Liga] it is a general prize for the team. I'm happy to be able to win it again.

Five Golden Boots, five Ballon d'Ors. Is a fifth Champions League all that is missing?
It would be good. As we said at the beginning of the season, the Champions League is always special for what it means and we would like to win it again.

At this point in your life, is football still your priority or has family taken over?
As soon as I had my children the priority was always my family. Family is the most important thing. Obviously I love football, and I live for it, but family is above all.

Is three children enough or would you like to have more?
Ciro is just beginning to stand up. Antonela and I would like to have a girl but we'll see.

We have seen your two other children, Mateo and Thiago, at Camp Nou. What kind of things do they ask that catches your attention?
They both like football a lot. Thiago understands more because he is older and discusses everything about the game. He is very involved.

Aim...in Champions League action, against PSV

Is he demanding of his father?
Yes, yes...I already have a couple of criticisms. He follows Barcelona, La Liga and the Champions League. He likes it, asks questions, reports and he tells me when things are not so good.

Is it true that when Barcelona lose you don't talk about football at home?
It was before, but not now. It's always hard to digest defeats and poor performances but Thiago forces me to comment on what happened and explain why we didn't win. We talk a lot more now.

Your team-mate Marc-Andre Ter Stegen was only a substitute for Germany at the World Cup. Did you think that was unfair, given his season and the injury that Manuel Neuer had at Bayern Munich?
It was a surprise. Marc had had a great year but it's up to them.

There's a lot of talk about Matthijs De Ligt and Frenkie De Jong. Have you seen them play a lot? Do you think they are players that could fit the style of Barcelona?
They come from a school very similar to ours and they work in the same way. They play like us with the ball. They are young players with great precision, two very good players.

What is your impossible dream, something you would like to do but know you can't?
Nothing is impossible. We have to fight and give our all and achieve everything we set out to do. With that mentality, work and effort, nothing is impossible.

Recently you said that you have to improve your taking of penalties. Where do you get that improvement? Do you watch videos of goalkeepers and rehearse?
Training and watching. Today we study everything: the fouls, the penalties, the game. Everything is analysed and nothing is left to chance.

However, when you put the ball down for a free-kick it is almost half a goal. Is there much difference between penalties and free-kicks?
It's different. In one you have a barrier and ➤

"Family is the most important thing. Obviously I love football, and I live for it, but family is above all"

distance, it's a different type of shot and you don't have the pressure of having to score. With a penalty you have more to lose than win and the goalkeeper feels more comfortable. The pressure is very different.

Last year Barcelona broke more defensive records than attacking ones. What is happening this year, with the team conceding so many goals?
This year we are playing 4-3-3 again. Last year we had two lines of four and left very little space and it was more difficult to create goals. Now, with the 4-3-3, we have more possession and play better, but we are more disarmed in defence and opposition teams find the gaps. In recent games we have improved defensively and hopefully that improves.

Are you surprised by the quality of players coming through from Barca's youth system?
At first yes, but they've been training with us for some time now and you realise they are good players. The club does well to progress them and let them train with us, and they grow more from that. It's an important model.

Do you think one day we will see 11 youth-team players play for Barcelona again?
It's complicated. I think that they see it's not impossible to reach the first team and in the future it could happen but it will take time.

Sergio Busquets says that, to reach the top, young players need to remove themselves from a lot of "nonsense". Do you agree?
We come from another era. Today we live in another situation and we have to adapt to what we see. It's true that players get tempting offers. Those below think it's difficult to get to the first team, while in other places they are given that opportunity. And not just money. It's tempting.

Do you miss Andres Iniesta?
Obviously, both on and off the pitch. We shared many years, sharing a lot of things – a lot of time, training sessions, matches and situations away from football. Of course it is strange.

This season the title race in La Liga is more equal than ever...
Nowadays it's difficult to win against anyone and the league is very close and hard to win.

Is it good that the Spanish league is more competitive? Is there greater interest as it involves more than just the big three?
That was always said of the Spanish league, but the reality is there are many competitions where the same thing happens: two or three teams challenge and the others play in another championship. It's good for the competition and the fans.

This subject is spoken about a lot, but were you surprised to finish fifth in the Ballon d'Or ranking?
If I'm honest, I don't give much importance to it although it is a big prize. I knew this season I didn't have the chance to win it and therefore wasn't surprised.

This season Barcelona have played well in the Champions League. Is there a special motivation there?
Every year there is a desire to win the Champions League. The Champions League is unique, special: the most beautiful competition I have played in. It is a totally different competition that we all want to win.

Domestic battle... taking on Alaves

> "Nowadays [in La Liga] it's difficult to win against anyone and the league is very close and hard to win"

Ousmane Dembele's goal in the Champions League against Tottenham Hotspur was spectacular. He is a great player but he gives the impression that he still has to mature away from the pitch...
On the pitch he is a phenomenon, and it depends on him, He has all the opportunity in the world to do what he wants. He can be one of the best. On the other hand he's a young guy who is adapting to the city and the club. The less you speak about it, the better. It's necessary to leave him so he can be calm. He has already realised his mistakes and has rectified them. We are going to help him focus on football.

Are you surprised that Real Madrid are missing Cristiano Ronaldo so much?
At the beginning of the season I said they are a great club, one of the best in the world and with a lot of great players, but anyone would miss Cristiano. He scores a lot of goals and gives you many other things so it doesn't surprise me.

Interview by Carlos Carpio & Luis Fernando Rojo/ESM

A subscription makes the perfect gift for

Mother's Day

from just £32.49

Mother's Day
31st March

Treat your Mum with a subscription to her favourite magazine and receive a box of **Lindt Master Chocolatier Collection** chocolates worth **£6.99**.

51 issues £64.49
~~£107.53~~ SAVE £43.04

51 issues £154.49
~~£206.00~~ SAVE £51.51

52 issues £110.99
~~£159.05~~ SAVE £48.06

12 issues £32.49
~~£52.80~~ SAVE £20.31

12 issues £46.49
~~£67.00~~ SAVE £20.51

12 issues £32.99
~~£60.55~~ SAVE £27.56

Reasons to subscribe...

- Exclusive savings
- Never miss an issue
- Subscriber Rewards
- Money back guarantee: cancel any time

Whether she is a country-lover, golfing partner, wine connoisseur or passionate gardener, a subscription is the gift that keeps delivering.

Subscribe online at
magazinesdirect.com/16AA

0330 333 1113
Quote code: 16AA
Lines open Monday - Saturday, 8am - 6pm (UK time)

Complete the coupon below

Complete this coupon and send to: **FREEPOST TI Media Limited** (No further address needed. No stamp required – for UK only)

Your details:

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss: Forename:

Surname:

Email:

Address:

Postcode:

Home Tel No: (inc.area code)

Mobile No.

Date of Birth: D D M M Y Y Y Y

Magazine title: £

By submitting your information, you agree to our Privacy Policy available at www.ti-media.com/privacy/. Please keep me up to date with special offers and news from magazinesdirect.com and other brands within the TI Media Limited Group by ☐ email, ☐ post, ☐ telephone and/or ☐ SMS. You can unsubscribe at any time.

I would like to send a gift to:

Please also fill out 'Your Details' opposite. To give more than one subscription, please supply address details on a separate sheet.

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss: Forename:

Surname:

Email:

Address:

Postcode:

Magazine title: £

Total order amount: £

Choose from 2 easy ways to pay:

1. I enclose a cheque/postal order made payable to TI Media Limited, for £_____

2. Please debit £_____ from my:
☐ Visa ☐ Visa Debit ☐ MasterCard ☐ Amex

Card No:

Expiry Date: M M Y Y

Signature: Date:
(I am over 18)

☐ **Please keep me up to date with special offers and news just by email from carefully selected companies. Your personal details will not be shared with those companies - we send the emails and you can unsubscribe at any time.** Final closing date for all orders is 28th February 2019. Offer open to new UK subscribers only. Orders purchased as a gift will start with the next issue after Mother's Day. If you would like your gift subscription to start with an earlier issue please contact customer services. Orders purchased for yourself will start with the next available issue – please allow up to 6 weeks for delivery. Your gift will be delivered separately within 28 days after your first payment has cleared. Gifts only available to subscribers on the UK mainland. All prices are discounted from the full subscription rate advertised in each title, include P&P and are correct at time of going to press. If the magazine ordered changes frequency per annum, we will honour the number of issues paid for, not the term of the subscription. TI Media Limited may cancel a subscription and provide a pro rata refund if it ceases to publish the relevant title for any reason. For full terms and conditions, visit www.magazinesdirect.com/terms. For enquiries please e-mail: help@magazinesdirect.com or call: +44 (0) 330 333 1113. Lines are open Monday - Saturday 8am - 6pm UK Time. Calls to 0330 numbers will be charged at no more than a national landline call, and may be included in your phone provider's call bundle.

code: 16AA

6 of the best

Assist kings

Nick Bidwell picks out half a dozen of this season's most impressive creative players

1 Memphis DEPAY

LYON

According to his detractors, the flamboyant Dutch frontrunner is the embodiment of out-of-control ego; an arrogant and inconsistent maverick with little inclination to work for the common good.

However, there are two sides to every story and over the last calendar year the 24-year-old has proved himself the most charitable of team-mates, providing no fewer than 21 assists for OL.

"When I look at myself in the mirror, what I see above all is a creator," he declared in an interview with *France Football*, and the key to his current sky-high productivity levels is undoubtedly his conversion last spring from the role of winger to that of central striker.

Resurrected by Lyon following a disastrous 18 months at Manchester United, he told a reporter during pre-season: "Yeah, I'm happy at the moment. However, I do want to go to a bigger club."

Lyon president Jean-Michel Aulas was obviously not best pleased.

2 Arber ZENELI

HEERENVEEN

Comfortable on either flank, the elusive Kosovan is effectively his club's weapons supply chain, their irrepressible supplier of ammunition to the strikers. Without his lightning pace, Heerenveen simply would not carry the same attacking threat.

However, his days at the Abe Lenstra Stadion are strictly numbered as he will be a Bosman free agent at the end of this season – with Napoli, Fiorentina, Ajax, Galatasaray and Fenerbahce among the interested parties.

The Swedish-born son of Albanian parents, he joined Heerenveen from Elfsborg in November 2015 and opted a year later to play for the senior Kosovan team. Last autumn he scored a hat-trick in their 4-0 Nations League thumping of Azerbaijan.

3 Sebastien HALLER

EINTRACHT FRANKFURT

Signed from Dutch side Utrecht in the summer of 2017, the 24-year-old from the south Parisian suburbs is sometimes the forgotten man in a dazzling Frankfurt front line, somewhat overshadowed by Luka Jovic and Ante Rebic. But as the team's physical pivot, it is his unselfish movement that allows his quicksilver partners to run riot.

"My job is to put in the hard work," he explained to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* newspaper. "To hold up the ball and free up space for others. Naturally winning the ball in the air is another big part of my game."

He has won 20 French under-21 caps but may turn to Ivory Coast – for whom he qualifies through his mother – unless a senior call-up comes soon.

4 Ihar STASEVICH

BATE BORISOV

BATE's 33-year-old midfield veteran has been setting the standards for creativity in this term's Europa League, credited with six assists in as many group-stage starts.

And it was thanks in no small part to his cuteness on the ball, that the Belarus side finished a creditable second behind Chelsea and will be aiming to take advantage of any Arsenal sloppiness at the back in the next round.

In his element fashioning chances on the break, the Gunners must ensure they do not give him the time and space to pick a pass, while also watching out for his clever whipped-in set-pieces.

Belarus' Player of the Year for 2018, he has won nine domestic league titles with BATE and has 44 caps for his country.

5 Hans VANAKEN

CLUB BRUGGE

Still only 26, the quick-thinking schemer has improved no end over the last couple of seasons, notably playing with greater assertiveness and confidence.

A mixture of excellent ball control, metronomic distribution and a willingness to cover every inch of ground, he once gave the impression of not being especially happy in the spotlight. However, last season was his breakthrough year, giving tour de force performances week in and week out, claiming a Belgian league winners' medal and making his international debut in a friendly against Scotland – an event he likened to "a first day at school".

In some 200 appearances in the Belgian top flight – first with Lokeren then, since 2015, with Brugge – he has laid on 56 goals and missed just one game in the past five years.

His father, Vital, played as a sweeper for Lommel and Mechelen.

6 Carlos SOLER

VALENCIA

It says much for the attacking midfielder's powers of invention that no other player in this season's Champions League group stage was able to better his tally of four assists.

The 22-year-old could not prevent his side ultimately bowing out of the competition, but he certainly struck individual gold, enhancing both his reputation and market value.

More of the same and the Spanish under-21 international could well have a chance of a representative upgrade in the not-too-distant future.

A Valencia first-teamer for the past two years, he has often been the subject of fierce debate as to his best position. While some say his natural habitat is on the right wing, others think he is best used centrally.

TOMORROW'S STARS TODAY

Talentscout

FRENCH DEFENDERS

WORDS: Nick Bidwell

Rayan AIT-NOURI

Age 17 (06.06.01), Angers

In a sentence
The teenage left-back only made his Ligue 1 debut in August but he is already a target for some of Europe's top clubs. The fact that he is represented by super-agent Jorge Mendes says it all.

What they say
David Remisse, his under-15 coach at Paris FC: "As a youngster he didn't really want to be a full-back. He wanted to play further forward. I didn't give him much choice and he's now a TGV [France's high-speed train]. Back then I couldn't believe that pro clubs were not looking at him. He has a hand for a left foot."

France under-18s coach Jean-Luc Vannuchi: "He has a good head on his shoulders. Over-hyped young players do not tend to get on. With Rayan, I've no worries on that score."

Stephane Syvrin, a schoolboy coach at one of his first clubs, ASF Le Perreux: "His biggest asset is his calmness. He's someone who listens and wants to learn. He's poised, discrete and a worker."

3 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT AIT-NOURI

- Arguably his most important mentor was Angers under-19 coach Laurent Viaud, who later went on to scout for Rafa Benitez when he was manager of Liverpool. Little wonder the Reds were once interested in him.
- In his early days as a footballer he played in midfield, either in a playmaking role or in box-to-box mode.
- For obvious reasons, the player he admires the most is Real Madrid and Brazil attacking full-back Marcelo.

The story so far
Born to Algerian parents in the eastern Paris suburb of Montreuil, he cut his football teeth with local amateur teams AS Val de Fontenay, ASF Le Perreux and Paris FC before joining top-flight Angers a month after turning 15 in 2016.

He signed his first pro contract early last year and made his first-team debut in August, appearing as a late sub in a 3-1 loss to Paris Saint-Germain at the Parc des Princes. The player he had to mark that day? Kylian Mbappe.

Capped by France at under-18 and under-19 level, Angers have been keen to bring him along slowly, usually confining him to the subs' bench for the senior side.

The next step
Angers hope to keep him for at least another year, perhaps in a loan-back arrangement. According to several French media sources, Monaco were close to recruiting him last summer, as were Atletico Madrid, who reportedly tabled an €8million bid. He has also been linked to Manchester City, Manchester United, Wolverhampton Wanderers, Juventus and RB Leipzig.

Strengths
Possesses a wonderful left foot, has speed to burn and displays outstanding counter-attacking ability. Combines well with team-mates when pushing forward and is an accurate crosser. Plays with composure and authority, and is astute in his decision-making.

Weaknesses
Needs to tighten up his defensive game. Inevitably for one so young, he's still a work in progress in a physical sense.

> "Over-hyped young players do not tend to get on. With Rayan, I've no worries on that score"
>
> France under-18s coach Jean-Luc Vannuchi

Evan N'DICKA

Age 19 (20.08.99), Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
The French under-20 central defender, bought last summer from second-tier side Auxerre, has adapted instantly to his new environment, catching the eye with his combativity, good positional play, aerial strength and ability to bring the ball out from the back.

Sofiane ALAKOUCH

Age 20 (29.07.98), Nimes
Ultra-reliable Franco-Moroccan right-back who is Nimes born and bred. A popular figure at the Stade Costieres, he established himself in the first team while still an apprentice and won his first cap for the French under-21s towards the end of last season. He recently extended his contract with Nimes until 2021.

Boubacar KAMARA

Age 19 (23.11.99), Marseille
Home-grown centre-back who can also play as a midfield enforcer or at full-back. For a long time, Marseille coach Rudi Garcia was of the opinion that he would make a better number six.

Malang SARR

Age 20 (23.01.99), Nice
Born in Nice, he joined the academy of his local side at the age of six and his eventual breakthrough into the club's senior side during the 2016-17 season was very much down to much-respected Swiss boss Lucien Favre.

Powerful and quick, the central defender reads the game well and has benefitted enormously from Favre's insistence that he work on his distribution.

He has represented France in every category apart from the senior side.

Ferland MENDY

Age 23 (08.06.95), Lyon
Blessed with an almost indecent turn of pace, the left-back has made giant strides since joining OL from Le Havre in July 2017 – so much so that Barcelona are said to be ready to pay at least €35m for him. Made his senior debut for France in November.

Fode BALLO-TOURE

Age 22 (03.01.97), Monaco
The explosive left-back is living proof that a Paris Saint-Germain rejection slip does not necessarily mean a crash landing.

A member of the PSG side that lost to Chelsea in the 2016 UEFA Youth League Final, he spent a decade with the capital club before being cut in 2017.

However, he rebuilt his career at Lille and was capped three times by France at under-21 level before joining Monaco for €11m in January and signing a four-and-a-half year contract.

Ibrahima KONATE

Age 19 (25.05.99), RB Leipzig (Ger)
A skyscraper centre-back who moved to Germany in 2017 from Sochaux. Incredibly mature for one so young, his former Sochaux coach Albert Cartier recalls: "Even as an academy youngster he came across as a father figure."

Moussa NIAKHATE

Age 22 (08.03.96), Mainz (Ger)
Swapped Metz for the Bundesliga last summer and is doing a fine job of replacing Abdou Diallo, who left Mainz for table-topping Borussia Dortmund. Says he likes to draw inspiration from the tenacity in one-on-one situations of Paris Saint-Germain's Brazilian central defender Thiago Silva.

Glenn Moore

Skinner moves to America

Rising star adds to English coaching dominance in US

Whether the English Premier League is the world's best always provokes debate, but there is little doubt it is the most global in terms of players, coaches, owners and television viewers.

And perhaps it is because of this that it is extremely difficult for English managers to get a job in the league.

At the start of 2019, only five managers in the 20-team Premier League were English – and that includes the London-born Republic of Ireland international Chris Hughton – and none of those were at one of the "top six" clubs.

There is a similar situation in the women's game, except that it applies to North America's National Women's Soccer League (NWSL), which is arguably the best, certainly the most competitive, and probably the most global women's league. Of the nine clubs, just two are coached by Americans and both are locals: Chicagoan Rory Dames at Chicago Red Stars and New Jerseyite Denise Reddy at The Garden State's Sky Blue.

While there is also a Macedonian, Seattle Reign's Vlatko Andonovski, the dominant dugout accent is English, with six head coaches from across the Pond.

Marc Skinner is the latest, with the 35-year-old having left Women's Super League (WSL) side Birmingham City for Orlando Pride, where he replaced another Brit, Scotland's Tom Sermanni.

Skinner is married to former England international Laura Bassett who, having recently given birth to their first child, is currently not registered with a club. The 35-year-old has never played under Skinner and has previously baulked at the idea, so a playing return in NWSL would be a surprise even if, given her experience, she still has much to offer.

Skinner is a rising star, taking an under-resourced Birmingham into WSL contention in his first job after coming up through the club's youth ranks. Tipped for a bright future, he follows the path trod by another former Blues coach, Laura Harvey, who left Arsenal for Seattle Reign in 2013 and is now at Utah Royals. More recently, Matt Beard traded Liverpool for Boston Breakers, only to return home after the US club folded a year ago. Beard is now manager at WSL's West Ham. Current Chelsea coach Emma Hayes has also worked in the US, at Chicago Red Stars.

Success...Jill Ellis led USA to victory at the 2015 World Cup

But why the enthusiasm for English coaches? It can no longer be a cultural cringe and forlock-tug to the game's inventors. That made sense in the early years of the men's NASL, in the 1960s and 1970s, but the men are now World Cup regulars, while America's women have won three World Cups and four Olympic gold medals in the last three decades. The last two Olympics were won by Sweden's Pia Sundhage, while the 2015 World Cup came under Portsmouth-born Jill Ellis, but the other four were won by American coaches. Besides, Ellis moved to the United States at 15 and is a naturalised US citizen.

> In NWSL, the dominant dugout accent is English, with six head coaches from across the Pond

The answer appears twofold. One is that a lot of the best US coaches have secure, well-paid jobs in the college game. Historically, coach turnover has been low in the NWSL by the standards of male professional leagues, but the role remains intrinsically insecure and a third of the clubs fired their coach last year.

Bright future...Marc Skinner has taken over at Orlando Pride

The other factor is English coaches have been very successful and that often influences appointments. In the opening 2013 season, Tennessean Cindy Parlow Cone led Portland Thorns to the Championship while New Zealand's Aaron Lines steered Western New York Flash to the regular-season title. In the five seasons since, the regular season has always been won by an English coach, as have the last three Championships. Only last year, when Paul Riley's North Carolina Courage did the double, has one team won both competitions. Besides Riley, Laura Harvey and Mark Parsons have won trophies. No American coach has won either the regular season or the play-offs since Parlow Cone in 2013.

Other English NWSL debutants this year are Richie Burke at Washington Spirit and James Clarkson at Houston Dash. Both, like Riley, have been working in the US for many years.

Having played in New Zealand and English non-league, Clarkson moved to Houston 20 years ago and is a naturalised US citizen. Burke crossed the Atlantic as

a player, having been on the books of both Everton and Liverpool as a youth, and had a brief spell managing Livingston in Scotland in 2013.

The NWSL situation is unusual as most club coaches elsewhere are native, despite the success of Englishman Colin Bell, the current Ireland manager who won the Champions League with Frankfurt in 2015.

There are two Australians in England's WSL, Joe Montemurro at Arsenal and Tanya Oxtoby at Bristol City, plus Spain's Fran Alonso at second-tier Lewes. Spaniard Pedro Martinez Losa, Millwall's director of football, and Kiwi Dave Edmondson have worked in WSL in the recent past, but foreigners are very rare in the other major leagues.

There are reasons for this, other than linguistic and cultural barriers. Coaches' salaries are often not worth justifying the expense and dislocation of moving countries. There is less awareness, too, of opportunities and possibilities than in the men's game, with its plethora of agents and rolling news cycles.

Football may be a universal language but globalisation, in the hot seats of the women's game, still has a way to go. WS

Import... Bristol City's Tanya Oxtoby

Round -up

NADIM LEADS WINDOW MOVES

Some big names moved in the January transfer window, among them Denmark's Afghan-born striker Nadia Nadim (Manchester City to Paris Saint-Germain), Spanish playmaker Veronica Boquete (Beijing BG Phoenix to Utah Royals) and German goalkeeper Ann-Katrin Berger, who recovered from cancer last year (Birmingham City to Chelsea).

PSG move... Nadia Nadim

WSL newcomers West Ham have strengthened with the arrival of South Korean captain Cho So-hyun (Avaldsnes) and Canadian international Adriana Leon (Seattle Reign).

AFGHAN APPEAL REJECTED

Keramuddin Karim, the suspended head of the Afghanistan Football Federation, has had his appeal against a three-month interim ban rejected by FIFA. Karim has been accused of sexual and physical abuse of players and is also under investigation by the country's government.

FIFA has also been asked to investigate allegations of the misappropriation by the Somalian FA of cash earmarked for women's football.

RED STARS PROFIT IN DRAFT

Chicago Red Stars selected US international Tierna Davidson with the No1 pick in the draft. The defender has quit Stanford University to play professionally. However, No2 pick Hailie Mace, though chosen by Sky Blue, indicated she did not want to play for the club, which was criticised for sub-par facilities and won one game last season. She may go to Melbourne City instead. Sky Blue did acquire Japan's Nahomi Kawasumi from Seattle.

Family...Yeo Moriba with her son, Paul Pogba

AMBASSADOR ROLE FOR POGBA'S MUM

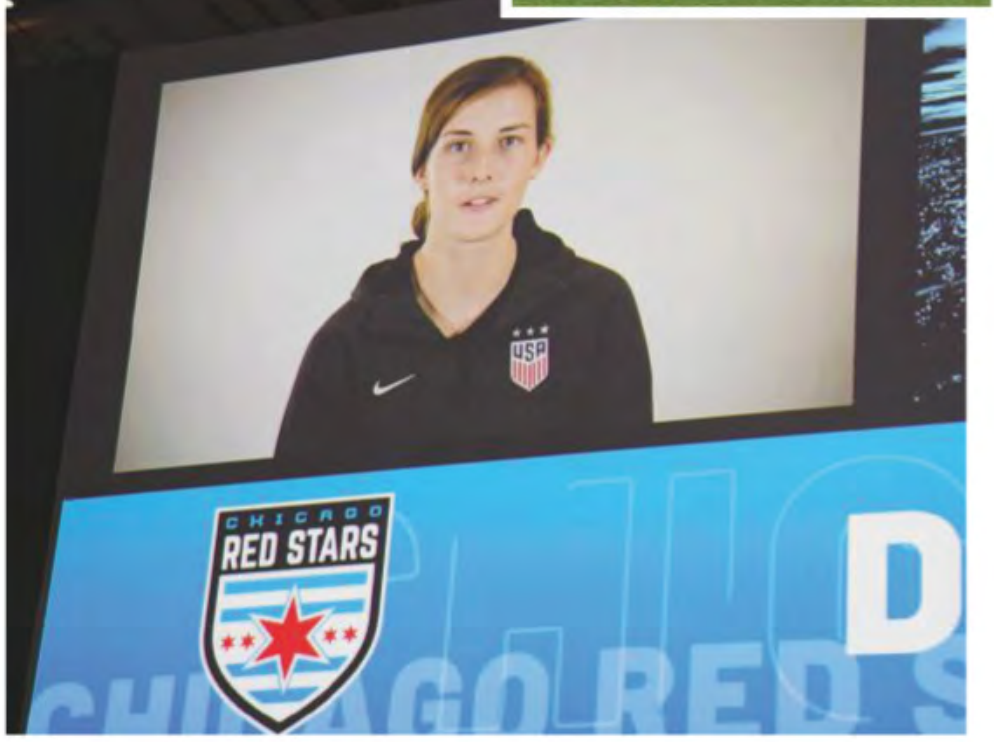
Paul Pogba's mother, Yeo Moriba, has been appointed an ambassador for women's football by the Guinea Football Federation. The Manchester United and France midfielder's mother herself played for Guinea, as have his brothers Florentin and Mathias.

RACISM CLAIM IN ENGLISH MATCH

The English FA is investigating an allegation of racism directed at Tottenham Hotspur's Renee Hector by an unnamed Sheffield United player.

The FA has also agreed a settlement with former international manager Mark Sampson shortly before his claim for wrongful dismissal following his sacking in late 2017 came to court.

Investigation... Renee Hector



Pick...Tierna Davidson

February 1973

Results make Germany the best team in the world

Having made his debut for England in a 1-1 draw with Yugoslavia the previous October, Ipswich Town skipper Mick Mills was the cover star of an issue that featured a review of the international year in 1972.

In his article, Eric Batty argues that "there is much more in football besides winning and losing" and uses Alf Ramsey's side to prove his point.

Batty writes: "The results of 1972 place England well down the list, and though I do not often find myself on common ground with die-hard England supporters, it is clear that in 1972 England were not as bad as her results suggested by comparison with other teams.

"For example, to suggest that England really are to be rated only 18th in the world would be totally misleading."

He goes on to pinpoint that summer's European Championship, suggesting: "I have no doubt that but for a quarter-final draw pairing England with West Germany, England would have reached the semi-finals and possibly the Final."

Batty accepts that "no one could begrudge the Germans their superb success at Wembley", but also feels "it would be foolish to rate Hungary or perhaps even Belgium and the USSR as necessarily better than England".

The latter half of 1972 saw the start of the qualifying campaign for the World Cup two years later, and the rankings table gave a clear early indication of how the 1974 tournament would pan out.

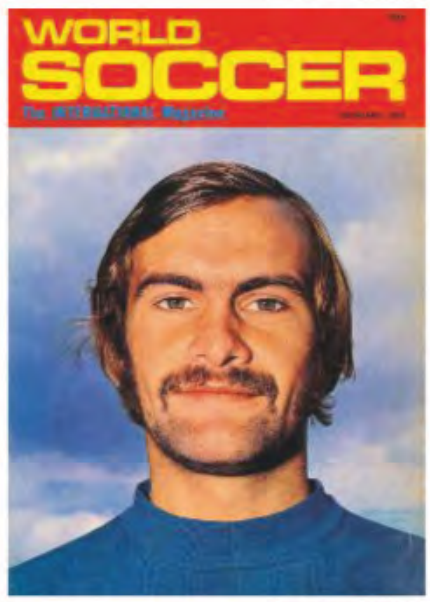
Described by Batty as "quite the best team in the world and probably the best team world football has seen at international level since the great Hungarians of the fifties", West Germany were ranked first in the 1972 table and went on to be crowned world champions on home soil two years later, beating Holland – who were ranked second in the 1972 list – in the Final.

Brazil (ranked third) and Poland (fifth) would make up the semi-final quartet.

Of the 1972 Olympic football gold medallists and future World Cup third-place play-off winners Poland, Batty says: "They have clearly joined the leading countries after many years of almost making the big time."

Having stated that "I expect them to acquit themselves well in World Cup qualifying", Batty suggested that the Poles could "hold their own in their two matches against England".

In the end they did more than that, winning 2-0 at home in June 1973 and getting a 1-1 draw at Wembley four months later as England failed to qualify for the World Cup. WS



Denied...Germany (in white) deny England in the European Championship

> "Probably the best team world football has seen at international level since the great Hungarians of the fifties"
>
> Eric Batty on West Germany

					Goals		%
West Germany	7	6	1	0	19	4	92.8
Holland	5	4	1	0	19	1	90.0
Brazil	5	4	1	0	8	2	90.0
Portugal	10	8	1	1	22	5	85.0
Poland	3	2	1	0	5	1	83.3
Belgium	8	5	2	1	15	4	75.0
Spain	6	3	3	0	7	3	75.0
Chile	4	3	0	1	7	7	75.0
East Germany	5	3	1	1	10	3	70.0
France	8	5	1	2	15	7	68.7
Scotland	9	5	2	2	13	5	66.6
Austria	6	3	2	1	11	5	66.6
Mexico	6	4	0	2	10	7	66.6
Argentina	10	6	1	3	20	9	65.0
Yugoslavia	14	6	5	3	28	20	60.7
Bulgaria	5	2	2	1	9	3	60.0
Paraguay	5	3	0	2	14	7	60.0
England	7	3	2	2	7	5	57.1
Russia	14	6	4	5	17	17	57.1
Sweden	8	3	3	2	18	10	56.2
Rumania	8	2	5	1	13	10	56.2
Italy	8	2	4	2	13	9	50.0
Eire	6	3	0	3	10	10	50.0
Greece	5	2	1	2	3	10	50.0
Czechoslovakia	9	3	2	4	13	11	44.4
Denmark	6	2	1	3	10	11	41.6
Finland	6	1	3	2	3	10	41.6
Hungary	10	2	4	4	11	12	40.0
Switzerland	5	0	4	1	3	7	40.0
N. Ireland	5	1	2	2	2	6	40.0
Turkey	3	1	0	2	3	3	33.3
Peru	10	3	0	7	9	16	30.0
Uruguay	7	1	2	4	2	6	28.5
Luxembourg	4	1	0	3	2	13	25.0
Norway	7	1	1	5	6	18	21.4
Wales	4	0	1	3	0	5	12.5
Albania	2	0	0	2	0	3	0
Iceland	4	0	0	4	3	17	0
Cyprus	3	0	0	3	0	9	0
Malta	5	0	0	5	0	17	0

League table... rankings in 1972

Also in this issue...

p4 Paul Gardner tells a story about watching a beach game in Brazil that involved several former Santos players, including 28-year-old ex-Brazil striker Coutinho. "I looked for some signs of that former brilliance but there was nothing," reveals Gardner. "Coutinho was simply the player doing the shouting, a shadow – albeit a substantially overweight shadow – of a once great player...the most talented player of his generation, burnt out before his skills had matured."

p6 In his Soccer Notebook, Roger MacDonald explains how the Russian FA is planning to do away with draws in the coming season as "part of a brighter football scheme designed to answer criticisms of dull domestic matches" and settle drawn games with penalties.

p33 In South America, Eric Weil reports on how San Lorenzo became the first club in Argentina to complete the double" of winning both the First Division and the National Championship, although he did point out that they "had often failed to please with their soccer during the season".

p34 Brian Glanville calls Burnley's return to the First Division a "small miracle", while club chairman Bob Lord says "the reason why we've come back is we've been patient; there's been no sackings, no heads rolling".

p38 Having set a new national record by scoring 65 goals in their 22 games, Stellan Danielsson says that "thanks to Atvidaberg and its many star players, the Swedish league championship regained some of yesteryear's glamour".

10 years ago

Melbourne Victory beat Adelaide United 1-0 in the A-League Grand Final at the Telstra Dome with a goal from Tom Pondeljak.

20 years ago

Barcelona extend their lead at the top of La Liga with a 3-0 win in the *classico* against Real Madrid, thanks to goals from Luis Enrique (two) and Rivaldo at the Camp Nou.

30 years ago

Eric Cantona joins Bordeaux on loan until the end of the season after Marseille ban him for a month for kicking a ball into the crowd and ripping off his shirt in a friendly.

40 years ago

Nottingham Forest manager Brian Clough makes Trevor Francis the first £1million footballer when he signs him from Birmingham City.

50 years ago

Tottenham Hotspur's new signing Roger Morgan comes up against twin brother and former QPR team-mate Ian for the first time as the two clubs meet at Loftus Road.

PROGRAMMES

FREE

FOOTBALL PROGRAMMES

To receive a FREE programme plus a copy of our latest catalogue (listing several thousand different mint condition Big Match, League, Scottish, Irish, Foreign and Non-League teams programmes etc.) please send your name and address to:

STEVE EARL FOOTBALL PROGRAMMES (DEPT.WS)
BROAD STREET, BUNGAY, SUFFOLK, NR351AH, ENGLAND

or phone 01986 892621 or visit www.footballprogs.co.uk

The Official 2018 World Cup Tournament Programme £15 (inc.p&p)

(Credit/Debit Cards & PayPal accepted)

MISCELLANEOUS

The European Championship

A Complete History (Part I: 1960-1976)

Richard Keir

The first in a series of books charting the history of the European Championship.

On sale priced £9.99 paperback and £1.99 e-book from all good bookshops worldwide instore and online.

Also available through Amazon and from the publisher's own website: rowanvalebooks.com

England's story. On a bog roll.

20% off

Use discount code WORLDSOCCER

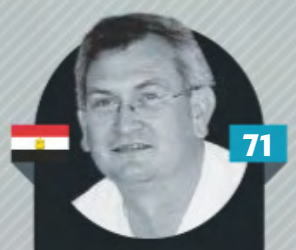
crapgoods.com

World Service

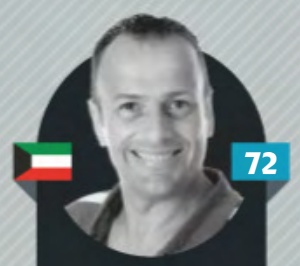
INCORPORATING Global diary

Exclusive reports from our worldwide network of correspondents

SEAN CREEDON — Republic of Ireland — 76



MARK GLEESON — Egypt — 71

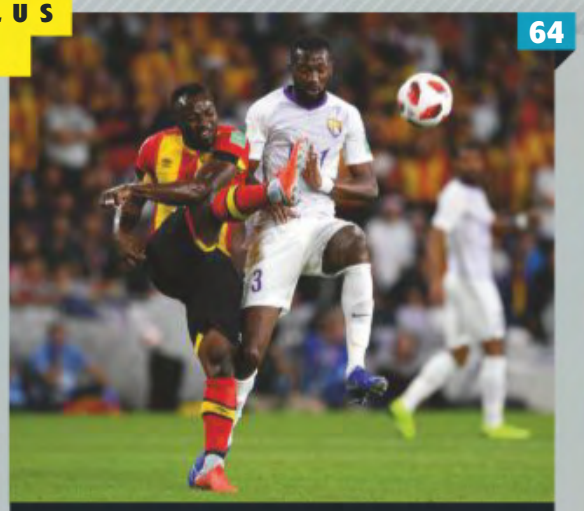


STEVE MENARY — Kuwait — 72

TIM VICKERY — Sudamericana Cup — 74

GAVIN HAMILTON — Club World Cup — 64

PLUS



64

Surprise finalist...Al Ain's Tongo Doumbia (in white)

SQUADS

67 Club World Cup

REVIEW

68 South American leagues

DIARY

70 Comprehensive global news

RESULTS, TABLES & FIXTURES

78 Club football
80 Internationals
81 ESM XI

74

New name on the trophy...Athletico Paranaense

Club World Cup

GAVIN HAMILTON

Madrid win fourth title

European champions triumph over hosts Al Ain in Abu Dhabi

Take one trophy, add six continental champions, one middle eastern host and some indifferent crowds. It could only be FIFA's Club World Cup, held for the second successive year in the United Arab Emirates amid large indifference from most of the world.

Real Madrid won a record fourth title and have now won the last three editions of the tournament. They also go ahead of Barcelona as the team to have won the tournament the most times.

In the end it proved a stroll for Madrid. After Gareth Bale's hat-trick had seen them past Asian club champions Kashima Antlers in the semi-finals, they thrashed local side Al Ain in the Final in Abu Dhabi's Zayed Sports City Stadium, thanks to long-range strikes from Luka Modric and Marcos Llorente, a header from Sergio Ramos and an own goal.

After Al Ain had missed early chances to take a shock lead, Modric broke the deadlock in the 14th minute. Collecting the ball on the edge of the area he fired into the bottom corner.

From then on Real were in control and Llorente doubled the European champions' lead on the hour-mark with a volley from long range.

Ramos grabbed his side's third goal with a powerful header following a

Impressive...Al Ain's Khalid Eisa was inspired when it came to penalties

Challenge...Real Madrid's Gareth Bale is challenged by Mohammed Fayez of Al Ain

World beaters ...Real Madrid

"We put a finishing touch to that third consecutive Champions League"
Real Madrid coach Santiago Solari

corner before Al Ain scored a late consolation goal through Japanese defender Tsukasa Shiotani.

Real sub Vinicius Junior burst through in stoppage time and fired in a shot that defender Yahya Nader diverted into his own net.

Afterwards, coach Santiago Solari, who had won his first trophy as Real Madrid coach after just 13 games in charge, paid tribute to Zinedine Zidane, who stepped down after leading the club to a third Champions League title in a row last May.

"We are happy, these players deserve it," said Solari. "They have come here after a lot of work and a lot of wins. We put a finishing touch to that third consecutive Champions League.

"It is a feat of the club, this group and other coaches. We are also here thanks to Zidane. It will be difficult to match in the future."

Solari also became the first Argentinian coach to win the tournament; the previous five to have reached the Final were all in charge of South American sides, and all had lost.

And it was a good night for Ramos, who, along with Brazilian Marcelo, won his 20th title with Real Madrid, to go third in the club's list of all-time winners, behind Gento and Manuel Sanchis. Ramos also became the third player to score in three Club World Cup Finals – matching the achievements of Lionel Messi and former Madrid team-mate Cristiano Ronaldo.

Not surprisingly, Al Ain ran out of steam in the Final after playing four games in 10 days.

"Nothing is impossible," coach Zoran Mamic had declared as his side prepared to face Real Madrid, but he conceded: "I have to be conscious that the difference between the teams is like that between a Smart car and a Mercedes."

Al Ain, playing in the tournament as the champions of the UAE Pro League,

had produced arguably the biggest upset in the competition's history when they beat South American champions River Plate on penalties in the semi-final.

In a dramatic opening quarter hour, Swedish striker Marcus Berg gave Al Ain a shock lead with a header from a corner before River hit back with two goals from Colombian Rafael Borre.

Al Ain then had a goal ruled out by VAR just before half-time before Brazilian winger Caio brought the scores level early into the second half with a brilliant solo effort. Goalkeeper Khalid Eisa then made a string of fine saves to take the game into extra-time and then penalties. He palmed away River's last penalty to send the hosts into the Final.

"We spoke in the changing room before," said Caio, who also scored the opening penalty in the shoot-out. "We'll run until we die."

Berg, who had been substituted on 75 minutes after suffering from a virus that had hit the squad, was forced to watch the shoot-out from the sidelines.

"Yeah, I was shaking," said Berg. "I was more nervous than as if I was out on the pitch. It was a fantastic feeling to see great penalties and a fantastic save in the last one from Khalid [Eisa].

"We have a great goalkeeper who can win games for us, which is what you need. But I have to praise the whole team, who made an amazing effort.

"In the end we deserved to win, even though they are a fantastic team. We did a great performance. I'm very proud of the team; we tried our best. It's once in a lifetime this, and together with our fans we showed the right attitude and that we really tried and wanted this."

Al Ain had seemed set for an early exit after conceding three first-half goals to New Zealand part-timers Team Wellington in the tournament's opening game. But a strong second-half performance brought the scores level, with Berg grabbing an 85th-minute equaliser to force extra-time and penalties, where keeper Eisa twice saved the hosts' blushes.

Al Ain raced into an early lead against Esperance in the quarter-finals thanks to goals from Mohamed Ahmed and man of the match, Egyptian Hussein El Shahat. A third from Bandar Al Ahbabi confirmed a semi-final meeting with River Plate.

"We changed that game [against Team Wellington] and showed great mentality in the other games," Berg said after the semi-final. "During this journey we started to believe more and more and right now we have to believe we can do a great Final.

"All the UAE is proud of us because we showed a great mentality and that we have good players and good teams in this league. So it's good for the whole country what we're doing.

"It's the Club World Cup Final and it's a massive thing for all of us. To play here, in front of our fans and to go to the Final, I don't think a lot of people believed that was possible from the start. So it's a massive, massive thing for everyone."

Keeper Eisa, with his penalty saves, and wingers El Shahat and Caio, with their pace and trickery, were the outstanding performers for Zoran Mamic's side. Their remarkable route to the Final was all the more striking given that, by the time Caio scored in the shoot-out against River, Al Ain had played 330 minutes of football in six days.

Al Ain also enjoyed a fair slice of luck. River Plate's Gonzalo Martinez hit the crossbar from the penalty spot in the 69th minute of the semi-final.

River had arrived in UAE after the epic, draining Libertadores Cup Final matches, in Buenos Aires and Madrid, against Boca Juniors but coach Marcelo Gallardo was philosophical about the defeat. "There are no excuses," he said. "We didn't play the match with the right determination."

River would have preferred to head home after the semi-final but had to stay another three days for the third-place play-off against Kashima Antlers, who were comfortably beaten 4-0.

Kashima Antlers had seen off CONCACAF champions Guadalajara in the quarter-final and the tournament ended in further disappointment for the Mexicans when they lost to Esperance on penalties in the fifth/sixth place play-off after a 1-1 draw.

There were capacity crowds for Al Ain's semi-final and the Final, but only 5,883 watched the 5th/6th play-off and 3,997 were present to see Kashima Antlers beat Guadalajara.

Even Al Ain's opening game against Wellington attracted only 15,279. The attendance for the third place play-off was recorded at 13,550. The Final, played in the same stadium three hours later, was watched by 40,696.

The Club World Cup, in its current format, remains a curate's egg of a tournament. A stage for some of the world's best players has all too often been distorted by money, allowing the likes of Al Ain – however commendable their performances might have been – to gatecrash the party.

Real Madrid are club world champions once again, but the title holds less and less status as the years go by.

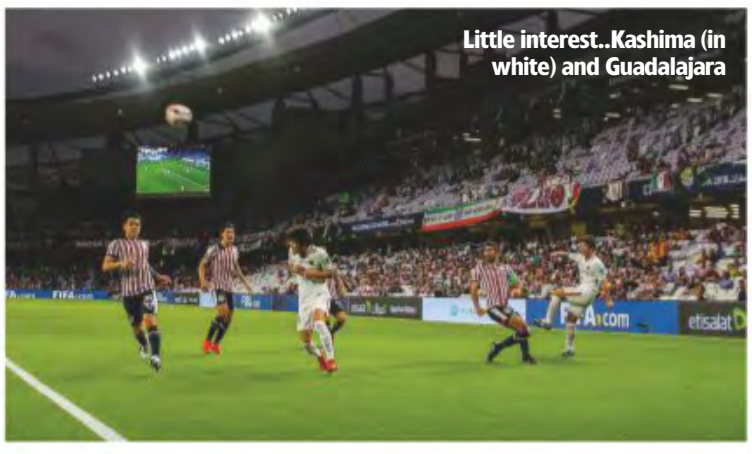
FIFA president Gianni Infantino's plans for an expanded tournament are currently on hold amid accusations of financial opaqueness regarding possible funding from Saudi Arabia.

However, the current format clearly needs to change. WS

Upset...Marcus Berg (centre) scores for Al Ain against River Plate

Passionate...fans of Kashima Antlers

> "There are no excuses. We didn't play the match with the right determination"
> River Plate coach Marcelo Gallardo


Little interest..Kashima (in white) and Guadalajara

CLUB WORLD CUP 2018

AL AIN (UAE)

GOALKEEPERS

12	Hamad **AL MANSOORI**	(22) 28.03.96
1	Mohammed **BUSANDA**	(23) 20.06.95
17	Khalid **EISA**	(29) 15.09.89

DEFENDERS

5	Ismail **AHMED**	(35) 07.07.83
23	Mohamed **AHMED**	(29) 16.04.89
14	Mohammed **FAYEZ**	(29) 06.10.89
44	Saeed **JUMA**	(20) 08.07.98
19	Mohanad **SALEM**	(33) 01.03.85

MIDFIELDERS

6	Amer **ABDULRAHMAN**	(29) 03.07.89
16	Mohamed **ABDULRAHMAN**	(29) 04.02.89
11	Bandar **AL AHBABI**	(28) 09.07.90
13	Ahmed **BARMAN**	(24) 05.02.94
7	**CAIO** (Bra)	(24) 19.04.94
18	Ibrahim **DIAKY**	(36) 24.05.82
3	Tongo **DOUMBIA** (Mli)	(29) 06.08.89
74	Hussein **EL SHAHAT** (Egy)	(26) 21.06.92
30	Mohammed **KHALFAN**	(20) 28.08.98
88	Yahia **NADER** (Egy)	(26) 21.06.92
28	Sulaiman **NASSER**	(21) 23.06.97
33	Tsukasa **SHIOTANI** (Jap)	(30) 05.12.88
43	Rayan **YASLEM**	(24) 23.11.94

FORWARDS

9	Marcus **BERG** (Swe)	(32) 17.08.86
99	Jamal **IBRAHIM**	(27) 23.11.91

COACH

	Zoran **MAMIC** (Cro)	(47) 30.09.71

ESPERANCE (Tun)

GOALKEEPERS

1	Moez **BEN CHERIFIA**	(27) 24.06.91
23	Ali **JEMAL**	(34) 15.09.84
19	Rami **JERIDI**	(33) 25.04.85

DEFENDERS

12	Khalil **CHEMMAM**	(31) 24.07.87
22	Sameh **DERBALI**	(32) 23.11.86
5	Chamseddine **DHAOUADI**	(31) 16.01.87
2	Ali **MACHANI**	(25) 12.07.93
3	Aymen **MAHMOUD**	(22) 24.04.96
24	Iheb **MBARKI**	(26) 14.02.92
26	Houcine **RABII**	(27) 08.11.91

MIDFIELDERS

20	Ayman **BEN MOHAMED**	(24) 08.12.94
13	Ali **BEN ROMDHANE**	(19) 06.09.99
18	Saad **BGUIR**	(24) 22.03.94
25	Ghailene **CHAALALI**	(24) 28.02.94
15	Fousseny **COULIBALY** (IvC)	(29) 10.08.89
30	Franck **KOM** (Cam)	(27) 18.09.91
28	Mohamed **MESKINI**	(21) 05.06.97

FORWARDS

8	Anice **BADRI**	(28) 18.09.90
11	Mohammed **BELAILI** (Alg)	(26) 14.03.92
14	Haythem **JOUINI**	(25) 07.05.93
29	Taha **KHENISSI**	(26) 06.01.92
9	Bilel **MEJRI**	(22) 06.02.96
7	Adam **REJAIBI**	(24) 05.04.94

COACH

	Moine **CHAABANI**	(37) 18.06.81

GUADALAJARA (Mex)

GOALKEEPERS

1	Raul **GUDINO**	(22) 22.04.96
34	Miguel **JIMENEZ**	(28) 14.03.90
35	Antonio **TORRES**	(22) 23.05.96

DEFENDERS

28	Miguel **BASULTO**	(26) 07.01.92
6	Edwin **HERNANDEZ**	(32) 10.07.86
5	Hedgardo **MARIN**	(25) 21.02.93
4	Jair **PEREIRA**	(32) 07.07.86
16	Miguel **PONCE**	(29) 12.04.89
3	Carlos **SALCIDO**	(38) 02.04.80
17	Jesus **SANCHEZ**	(29) 12.04.89
2	Josecarlos **VAN RANKIN**	(25) 14.05.93

MIDFIELDERS

36	Fernando **BELTRAN**	(20) 08.05.98
11	Isaac **BRIZUELA**	(28) 28.08.90
31	Alan **CERVANTES**	(20) 17.01.98
10	Eduardo **LOPEZ**	(24) 17.09.94
25	Michael **PEREZ**	(25) 14.02.93
7	Orbelin **PINEDA**	(22) 24.03.96
13	Walter **SANDOVAL**	(23) 05.11.95
14	Angel **ZALDIVAR**	(24) 08.02.94
29	Alex **ZENDEJAS**	(20) 07.02.98

FORWARDS

23	Jesus **GODINEZ**	(21) 20.01.97
37	Cesar **HUERTA**	(18) 03.12.00
9	Alan **PULIDO**	(27) 08.03.91

COACH

	Jose **CARDOZO** (Par)	(47) 19.03.71

KASHIMA ANTLERS (Jap)

GOALKEEPERS

29	Shinichiro **KAWAMATA**	(29) 23.07.89
1	**KWOUN** Sun-tae (SKo)	(34) 11.09.84
21	Hitoshi **SOGAHATA**	(39) 02.08.79

DEFENDERS

32	Koki **ANZAI**	(23) 31.05.95
39	Tomoya **INUKAI**	(25) 12.05.93
35	**JUNG** Seung-hyun (Sko)	(24) 03.04.94
28	Koki **MACHIDA**	(21) 25.08.97
22	Daigo **NISHI**	(31) 28.08.87
3	Gen **SHOJI**	(26) 11.12.92
2	Atsuto **UCHIDA**	(30) 27.03.88
16	Shuto **YAMAMOTO**	(33) 01.06.85

MIDFIELDERS

8	Shoma **DOI**	(26) 21.05.92
25	Yasushi **ENDO**	(30) 07.04.88
26	Kazune **KUBOTA**	(21) 01.01.97
11	**LEANDRO** Moura (Bra)	(25) 12.05.93
4	**LEO SILVA** (Bra)	(32) 24.12.85
6	Ryota **NAGAKI**	(30) 04.06.88
40	Mitsuo **OGASAWARA**	(39) 05.04.79
18	**SERGINHO** (Bra)	(23) 15.03.95
36	Toshiya **TANAKA**	(21) 02.12.97

FORWARDS

30	Hiroki **ABE**	(19) 28.01.99
14	Takeshi **KANAMORI**	(24) 04.04.94
19	Kazuma **YAMAGUCHI**	(22) 17.01.96

COACH

	Go **OIWA**	(46) 23.06.72

REAL MADRID (Spa)

GOALKEEPERS

13	Kiko **CASILLA**	(32) 02.10.86
25	Thibaut **COURTOIS** (Blg)	(26) 11.05.92
1	Keylor **NAVAS** (CR)	(32) 15.12.86

DEFENDERS

2	Dani **CARVAJAL**	(26) 11.01.92
12	**MARCELO** (Bra)	(30) 12.05.88
6	**NACHO**	(28) 18.01.90
19	Alvaro **ODRIOZOLA**	(22) 14.12.95
4	Sergio **RAMOS**	(32) 30.03.86
23	Sergio **REGUILON**	(21) 16.12.96
5	Raphael **VARANE** (Fra)	(25) 25.04.93

MIDFIELDERS

20	Marco **ASENSIO**	(22) 21.01.96
14	**CASEMIRO** (Bra)	(26) 23.02.92
24	Dani **CEBALLOS**	(22) 07.08.96
22	**ISCO**	(26) 21.04.92
8	Toni **KROOS** (Ger)	(28) 04.01.90
18	Marcos **LLORENTE**	(23) 30.01.95
10	Luka **MODRIC** (Cro)	(33) 09.09.85
15	Federico **VALVERDE** (Uru)	(20) 22.07.98

FORWARDS

11	Gareth **BALE** (Wal)	(29) 16.07.89
9	Karim **BENZEMA** (Fra)	(30) 19.12.87
7	**MARIANO** (DoR)	(25) 01.08.93
17	Lucas **VAZQUEZ**	(27) 01.07.91
28	**VINICIUS JUNIOR** (Bra)	(18) 12.07.00

COACH

	Santiago **SOLARI** (Arg)	(42) 07.10.76

RIVER PLATE (Arg)

GOALKEEPERS

1	Franco **ARMANI**	(32) 16.10.86
25	Enrique **BOLOGNA**	(36) 13.02.82
14	German **LUX**	(36) 07.06.82

DEFENDERS

20	Milton **CASCO**	(30) 11.04.88
2	Jonatan **MAIDANA**	(33) 29.07.85
28	Lucas **MARTINEZ QUARTA**	(22) 10.05.96
29	Gonzalo **MONTIEL**	(21) 01.01.97
4	Jorge **MOREIRA** (Par)	(28) 01.02.90
22	Javier **PINOLA**	(35) 24.02.83

MIDFIELDERS

11	Nicolas **DE LA CRUZ** (Uru)	(21) 01.06.97
26	Ignacio **FERNANDEZ**	(28) 12.01.90
10	Gonzalo **MARTINEZ**	(25) 13.06.93
18	Camilo **MAYADA** (Uru)	(27) 08.01.91
15	Exequiel **PALACIOS**	(20) 05.10,98
24	Enzo **PEREZ**	(32) 22.02.86
23	Leonardo **PONZIO**	(36) 29.01.82
8	Juan **QUINTERO** (Col)	(25) 18.01.93
5	Bruno **ZUCULINI**	(25) 02.04.93

FORWARDS

9	Julian **ALVAREZ**	(18) 31.01.00
19	Rafael Santos **BORRE** (Col)	(23) 15.09.95
7	Rodrigo **MORA** (Uru)	(31) 29.10.87
27	Lucas **PRATTO**	(30) 04.06.88
32	Ignacio **SCOCCO**	(33) 29.05.85

COACH

	Marcelo **GALLARDO**	(42) 18.01.76

TEAM WELLINGTON (NZ)

GOALKEEPERS

1	Scott **BASALAJ**	(24) 19.04.94
22	Marcel **KAMPMAN**	(20) 15.01.98
23	Charlie **MORRIS**	(22) 26.02.96

DEFENDERS

15	Michael **BOSO** (Sol)	(27) 03.09.91
2	Justin **GULLEY**	(25) 15.01.93
3	Scott **HILLIAR**	(24) 25.07.94
4	Mario **ILICH**	(23) 23.06.95
17	Alex **PALEZEVIC**	(22) 11.11.96
6	Taylor **SCHRIJVERS**	(21) 20.12.96
5	Liam **WOOD**	(20) 30.03.98

MIDFIELDERS

11	Mario **BARCIA** (Arg)	(29) 05.11.89
12	Andy **BEVIN**	(26) 16.05.92
8	Henry **CAMERON**	(21) 28.06.97
18	Aaron **CLAPHAM**	(31) 15.01.87
20	Tiahn **MANUEL**	(19) 22.05.99
7	Eric **MOLLOY** (Rol)	(26) 12.12.92
14	Jack-Henry **SINCLAIR**	(20) 23.02.98

FORWARDS

19	Ross **ALLEN** (Eng)	(31) 02.03.87
10	Nathanael **HAILEMARIAM**	(24) 08.03.94
9	Tom **JACKSON**	(27) 14.02.91
16	Angus **KILKOLLY**	(22) 18.04.96
24	Steven **LECEFEL** (Fra)	(32) 16.04.86
21	Hamish **WATSON**	(25) 17.04.93

COACH

	Jose **FIGUEIRA** (Eng)	(36) 09.02.82

(ages as of 12.12.18)

SOUTH AMERICAN LEAGUES

	HOW THE LEAGUE WAS WON	CONTINENTAL QUALIFIERS	PLAYER OF THE YEAR
Bolivia PRIMERA DIVISION	In a top flight expanded from 12 to 14 teams, San Jose won the Clausura, which was played on a home-and-away basis. They were third in the Apertura, which was won by Jorge Wilstermann, who beat The Strongest on penalties in the Championship play-off Final.	San Jose and Jorge Wilstermann enter the Libertadores Cup group stage, with The Strongest and Bolivar going into the qualifiers. Royal Pari, Oriente Petrolero, Nacional Potosi and Guabira qualified for the Sudamericana Cup.	San Jose's Colombian striker Jair Reinoso wrote the most glorious chapter in his long history in Bolivian football. The mobile cutting edge of the Clausura champions' attack, he now returns to La Paz and rejoins The Strongest.
Chile PRIMERA DIVISION	In a change from the previous Apertura/Clausura system, a single, season-long championship was won by Universidad Catolica who beat relegated Deportes Temuco on the final day of the season to claim their 13th title.	Universidad Catolica, Universidad de Concepcion and Universidad de Chile go into the Libertadores Cup, along with cup winners Palestino. Deportes Antofagasta, Colo Colo, Union La Calera and Union Espanola are in the Sudamericana.	The talent and imagination of twinkle-toed veteran playmaker Jorge Valdivia continue to stand out. He was the architect of Colo Colo beating Brazilian giants Corinthians – a rare high point for Chilean clubs in the Libertadores.
Colombia PRIMERA A	Deportes Tolima won the Apertura, their second title, after beating Atletico Nacional on penalties in the play-off Final. Junior won the Finalizacion with a 5-4 aggregate victory over Independiente Medellin in the Final.	Junior and Tolima qualified for the group stage of the Libertadores, with Independiente Medellin and Atletico Nacional. Sudamericana places went to Once Caldas, La Equidad, Rionegro Aguilas and Deportivo Cali.	Creative support striker Michael Rangel scored and set up plenty of goals for Atletico Bucaramanga, who were one of the year's surprise sides. He now returns to Junior for a third spell with his first professional club.
Ecuador SERIE A	Apertura winners LDU Quito beat Clausura winners Emelec 2-1 in the two-leg championship Final with goals in both legs from midfielder Anderson Julio.	LDU Quito and Emelec qualified for the Libertadores group stage, with Barcelona and Delfin heading into the qualifiers. Universidad Catolica, Macara, Independiente del Valle and Aucas go into the Sudamericana Cup	A late developer at 26, Luis Andres Chicaiza blossomed as an attacking midfielder who can dictate the play, set up chances and score goals with Delfin. He has now made what could be the defining move of his career, to champions LDU Quito.
Paraguay PRIMERA DIVISION	Olimpia added the Clausura championship to their Apertura crown to make it 42 league titles for the Asuncion-based club.	Olimpia are in the Libertadores group stage, with Cerro Porteno, while Libertad and Nacional start in the second and first rounds respectively. Sol de America, Independiente, Deportivo Santini and Guarani will compete in the Sudamericana.	In his second spell with the club, left-footed powerhouse Richard Ortiz shook off injury problems to balance out Olimpia's midfield.
Peru LIGA 1	Sporting Cristal won their 19th league title, beating Alianza Lima 7-1 on aggregate in the play-off Final. They had earlier won the season-opening Torneo de Verano and Apertura. Melgar won the Clausura but lost to Alianza Lima in the play-off semi-finals.	Sporting Cristal and Alianza Lima will compete in the LIbertadores group stage, with Melgar in the second stage and Real Garcilaso in the first stage. Deportivo Municipal, Sport Huancayo, UTC and Binacional all qualify for the Sudamericana.	Sporting Cristal's Argentinian striker Emanuel Herrera became the first player in the league's 106-year history to score 40 goals in a season. He led the line well and took advantage of the chances the team were creating.
Uruguay PRIMERA DIVISION	Penarol won a record 50th championship, successfully defending their title by beating Nacional in the play-off. Nacional won the Apertura while Penarol claimed the Clausura.	Penarol and Nacional qualified for the Libertadores group stage, with Danubio and Defensor entering the second and first stages respectively. Cerro, Liverpool, Montevideo Wanderers and River Plate qualified for the Sudamericana.	An attacking midfielder who appeared in all of Uruguay's World Cup games, Cristian Rodriguez is a wise old head, full of left-footed quality, around whom Penarol's youngsters blossomed in the second half of the year.
Venezuela PRIMERA DIVISION	Clausura champions Zamora won their fourth title, beating Apertura winners Deportivo Lara 5-1 on aggregate in the Serie Final.	Zamora and Deportivo Lara qualified for the Libertadores group stage, with Caracas and Deportivo Guaira heading into the second and first stage respectively. Minero, Estudiantes de Merida, Monagas and Zulia qualified for the Sudamericana.	Antonio Romero decided the destiny of the title with his hat-trick for Zamora in the Final against Deportivo Lara, his first club. A support striker who first showed promise with Venezuela's groundbreaking under-20 squad in 2017.

COACH OF THE YEAR

Having taken Jorge Wilstermann to a surprise Libertadores Cup quarter-final in 2017, Peruvian coach Roberto Mosquera is putting together an impressive body of work in Bolivia after managing a fine debut season in the top flight for Royal Pari.

Francisco Bozan is emerging as an intelligent coach and his Universidad de Concepcion side were surprise title challengers, pushing champions Universidad Catolica all the way.

The man who took Ecuador to the knockout stage of the 2006 World Cup, Luis Fernando Suarez put in a second consecutive solid year with La Equidad and was rewarded by being appointed coach of Junior.

Pablo Repetto took Independiente del Valle to the Libertadores Final in 2016 and the Uruguayan has now shown what he can do at a bigger club with more resources, making LDU worthy champions.

Like Gerardo Martino, Daniel Garnero is establishing himself as a coach in Paraguay after a successful playing career in his native Argentina. He won the title with Guarani two years ago, and his Olimpia won Apertura and Clausura titles in 2018.

After an impressive 12 months work in Peru, Mario Salas has returned home to Chile to take charge of Colo Colo. His Sporting Cristal side set out to take the initiative, pressed with an intensity very rarely seen in Peru and were utterly dominant.

Former international centre-back Diego Lopez took charge in the second half of the year and made a big impression at Penarol. He promoted the youngsters, filled them with confidence and reaped the rewards.

Zamora's title was a crowning moment in the long career of Ali Canas as a coach and an assistant – which includes Germany 2006, when he was part of Ghana's back-room staff.

Breakthrough... Ronaldo Sanchez

Champions... Universidad Catolica (in white)

Final... Junior and Independiente Medellin (in red)

Worthy... LDU Quito

Double...Olimpia

History... Emanuel Herrera

Play-off...Nacional (in white) and Penarol

Title...Ali Canas

NEWCOMER OF THE YEAR

It was a breakthrough season for wiry attacking midfielder Ronaldo Sanchez of Oriente Petrolero, who demonstrated the ability to work either flank or float behind the central striker.

Universidad Catolica's central midfielder Ignacio Saavedra made a big impression after his debut in August, but he ended the year with a serious knee injury.

The sale of Yimmi Chara to Atletico Mineiro of Brazil opened up space at Junior for winger Luis Diaz. Already an international, with more composure in front of goal he should win plenty more caps.

Independiente del Valle's 19-year-old centre-forward Stiven Plaza made such an impression in the last few months of the year that he won an international cap for Ecuador and earned a move to Valladolid in Spain.

An exuberant runner with the ball, Libertad's attacking midfielder Ivan Franco was thrown in at the deep end before his 18th birthday and did not disappoint.

Marcos Lopez enjoyed himself hugely as part of Sporting Cristal's attacking trio, cutting in from wide on the left to good effect. He made his international debut in September, against Germany.

Wanderers centre-back and captain of Uruguay's under-20 side, Bruno Mendez showed his promise with a fine display against Brazil in November when an injury crisis led to his senior debut. A key member of yet another promising Uruguayan generation.

Slightly built, skilful attacking midfielder Jose Bandez was often used cutting in from wide spaces by Carabobo. A promising creative force but needs to work more on his left foot.

2019

The Apertura and Clausura will both be played with a home-and-away system, with the winners of each going into the group stage of the Libertadores. The remaining two Libertadores places and the four Sudamericana places will be decided by the aggregate table.

Sixteen teams, including promoted Coquimbo Unido and Cobreloa, will play each other twice on a home-and-away basis over the course of the season, which kicks off on February 15.

The 20 teams will again play in two tournaments, Apertura and Finalizacion, each with a 19-match league format followed by a knockout stage featuring the top eight teams. The Apertura gets underway on January 27.

Twelve teams will again compete in the Apertura and Clausura, with each team playing the others home and away. The two winners meet in a third-stage Final over two legs. An aggregate table will decided continental qualifiers and relegation places.

The 12-team Apertura and Clausura will again be played on a home-and-away basis. An aggregate table will decide the continental qualifiers, while relegation places will be decided on a three-year points average.

Eighteen teams, two more than in 2018, will contest the Apertura and Clausura, which are played on a home-and-away basis, with the top two teams from each tournament meeting in the play-offs. The Apertura starts on February 15.

The 16-team championship, which begins on February 9, will again comprise of the Apertura and the Clausura, with an end-of-season play-off to decide the champions.

Both the 18-team Apertura and Clausura are played in a league format over 17 matches, with the top eight entering a knockout stage to determine the champions, who then meet in an end-of-season Serie Final.

Compiled by Tim Vickery

DECEMBER 14, 2018-JANUARY 15, 2019

Global diary

A comprehensive record of recent events around the world

Friday December 14

ARGENTINA: Five days after losing the Libertadores Cup Final to River Plate, coach Guillermo Barros Schelotto leaves Boca Juniors.
ITALY: Milan president Paolo Scaroni has a briefcase containing €10,000 stolen from a car in which he was travelling.

Saturday December 15

GERMANY: The father of Stuttgart captain Christian Gentner dies in the stadium after his son's side beat Hertha Berlin 2-1. Thomas Muller plays his 300th Bundesliga game for Bayern Munich as they win 4-0 against Hanover. A 2-1 victory over Werder Bremen gives Borussia Dortmund the honorary title of "autumn champion".
ITALY: Cristiano Ronaldo's penalty settles the Turin derby as Juventus beat Torino 1-0.
VIETNAM: Nguyen Anh Duc's goal secures a 1-0 victory at home to Malaysia for Vietnam, who win 3-2 on aggregate and claim the AFF Championship for a second time.

Sunday December 16

BELGIUM: Out of the Europa League and the domestic cup, Anderlecht sack coach Hein Vanhaezebrouck after a 2-1 defeat at Cercle Brugge leaves them in fourth place, nine points behind Genk, who are top of the table.
COLOMBIA: Junior lose 3-1 away to Independiente Medellin but still win 5-4 on aggregate to become Finalizacion champions.
EGYPT: Al Ahly appoint one-time Real Sociedad boss Martin Lasarte as coach.
ENGLAND: Southampton end Arsenal's 22-match unbeaten run with a 3-2 win on manager Ralph Hasenhuttl's home debut. Xherdan Shaqiri comes off the bench to score twice as Liverpool beat Manchester United 3-1.
HOLLAND: Daley Blind and Hakim Ziyech both get hat-tricks as Ajax thrash De Graafschap 8-0.
MEXICO: Edson Alvarez scores both goals as America beat Cruz Azul in the deciding leg of the Liga MX Final to win their 13th title and become outright record champions in the Mexican professional era.
PERU: Sporting Cristal beat Alianza Lima 3-0 to lift the national title for a 19th time.

Monday December 17

SERBIA: Fulham striker Aleksandar Mitrovic is the Football Association of Serbia's player of the year.
USA: Next season's MLS play-offs will scrap two-legged home-and-away ties and feature 14 teams, rather than the previous 12.

Tuesday December 18

CLUB WORLD CUP: Al Ain beat River Plate on penalties after drawing 2-2 and become the first team from the UAE to reach the Final of the tournament.
ENGLAND: Manchester United sack manager Jose Mourinho with the team 19 points behind the league leaders. It is announced that FA Cup fifth-round replays will be removed as of this season – a year earlier than previously planned.
GERMANY: Fortuna Dusseldorf end Borussia Dortmund's unbeaten start to the Bundesliga season with a 2-1 win.
USA: Zlatan Ibrahimovic signs a new contract with LA Galaxy.

Wednesday December 19

ENGLAND: Manchester United appoint Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, who scored the club's winning goal in the 1999 Champions League Final, as caretaker manager. Dele Alli is hit on the head by a plastic bottle thrown from the crowd as Tottenham Hotspur win 2-0 at Arsenal in the League Cup quarter-finals.
ITALY: Frosinone sack Moreno Longo after just one win this season and replace him with Marco Baroni.
RUSSIA: Deputy prime minister Vitaly Mutko, who was banned from the Olympics for life over doping scandals, resigns as Russian Football Union president.

Thursday December 20

BOLIVIA: San Jose draw 1-1 at home to Royal Pari to claim the Clausura title.
GREECE: Super League referees go on strike after a colleague, Thanasis Tzilos, was attacked by

Final...Edson Alvarez of America celebrates with team-mates after scoring the first of his two goals against Cruz Azul

Over...Fortuna Dusseldorf (in red) end Borussia Dortmund's run

four assailants as he left his home in Larissa the previous day.

Friday December 21

CAMEROON: After being stripped of the right to stage the 2018 African Nations Cup, Cameroon are awarded the hosting rights for the 2021 tournament, which was scheduled to be held in Ivory Coast.
GERMANY: Top-of-the-table Borussia Dortmund beat second-place Borussia Monchengladbach 2-1 in the last round of Bundesliga games before the winter break.
NORTHERN IRELAND: Newry City's game with Glentoran is postponed after the car in which the four match officials are travelling is involved in an accident.

Saturday December 22

ENGLAND: Ole Gunnar Solskjaer's first game in charge of Manchester United sees him win 5-1 at Cardiff City, who he managed in 2014. Chelsea and Manchester City ➤

Caretaker...Ole Gunnar Solskjaer

Egypt

MARK GLEESON

Hosts...Egyptian representatives celebrate CAF's decision

New Nations Cup host

CAF takes decision after Cameroon stripped of hosting rights

Egypt showed much more interest and provided the necessary government financial guarantees in order to be named as the next African Nations Cup hosts, taking over this June's tournament from Cameroon after winning the CAF executive committee vote – reportedly beating South Africa by a landslide 16-1 – at their January meeting in Dakar.

Concerns over Cameroon's ability to stage the expanded 24-team tournament led to the switch, with Egypt boasting a large sporting and tourism infrastructure that means there should be little logistical problems for them.

But their decision to bid – at first saying they were not interested and then changing their mind after Morocco said they would not be putting forward their candidacy – came as a surprise given how the military rulers in Cairo have put a real damper on the sport by restricting crowds over the last seven years for supposed "security" reasons.

This has had a major impact on the financial situation of the country's top club sides and taken much lustre from the local game, although Egypt's qualification for last year's World Cup provided a positive injection of renewed enthusiasm.

Football ultras were among the most strident participants – playing a significant role in the Tahrir Square demonstrations – in the Arab Spring that offered Egypt a brief end to the long-standing influence of the military and brought an end of the long-standing rule of Hosni Mubarak in early 2011.

The army has since reasserted its power and, using the stadium disaster in Port Said in 2012 as a pretext, restricted attendances at games, forced others to be played behind closed doors and kept the national team away from their flagship stadium in Cairo.

Its fear is that football stadiums are one of the few places where dissent cannot be properly controlled and this could contribute to the appetite for another people's revolution. But by offering to host the 2019 Nations Cup a signal has been sent that football in Egypt could finally return to normal.

The Cairo Stadium, along with the refurbished Port Said Stadium and venues in Alexandria, Ismailia and Suez, have been put forward as venues for the tournament, which starts on June 15 and concludes on July 13.

It was never in much doubt that 2010 World Cup hosts South Africa had no chance, even though their FA general secretary Russell Paul said: "We could host it tomorrow if needed."

South Africa have few friends among the African football fraternity – historically for a perceived haughty attitude towards the rest of the continent and more tangibly a failure to support Morocco in an unsuccessful bid to host the 2026 World Cup.

> "There was no commitment on the part of the government"
> CAF president Ahmad on why South Africa's bid failed

According to CAF president Ahmad, South Africa also failed to provide any financial guarantees, arguing: "In their case, there was no commitment on the part of the government, while in the case of Egypt there is the commitment of the prime minister and above all a budget that has already been allocated."

Ahmad has also negotiated that the following three tournaments be in Cameroon (2021), Ivory Coast (2023) and Guinea (2025).

The Ivorians were due to host in 2021 and were initially unhappy with being delayed by two years but have seemingly agreed to wait an extra two years, as is the case with Guinea, who had originally been scheduled for 2023. WS

Kuwait

STEVE MENARY

Out of the wilderness

National side set to play in World Cup qualifiers once more

Suspended in October 2015 by FIFA for the third time in eight years for government interference, football in Kuwait is finally returning to normal – but there still remains plenty of work to be done.

The ban hit the game hard, with the country's representative sides banned from all FIFA, AFC and Olympic competitions.

"The gap will take some time [to get over]," admits Romeo Jozak, who will have been in charge of the national team for just over a year by the time Kuwait begin their 2022 World Cup qualifiers in September.

"It will have more influence over the Olympic team as they are younger. At under-17, under-19 and the Olympic team, not to play at that age is tough."

Kuwait have reached the finals of three Olympic football tournaments, but their last appearance was in 2000 and they sat out the last qualifying campaign due to their exile.

"There are two talents in the Olympic team that I want to push to Europe, but it's tough because its cold and the environment is so different," says Jozak. "The jobs here are also so well paid that it will be tough for them to leave their job."

Those players are Abdelaziz Alenezi, aged 20, and 19-year-old Eid Alrashidi. Both are midfielders from Qadsia, who are one of three dominant sides in the Kuwaiti Premier League, along with Al Arabi and reigning champions Kuwait Sporting Club.

The FIFA ban also meant Kuwaiti club sides were excluded from AFC competition until this season and Kuwait SC – who were AFC Cup winners in 2009, 2012 and 2013 – will play Jordanian champions Al Wehdat in the Champions League preliminary round in February.

"Most of the guys are working in the morning. If you don't fall asleep with football on your mind it's tough"

National coach Romeo Jozak on his squad

While there are overseas players from Africa and Brazil in the local league, most domestic players are part-time. As part of his plan to catch up with other Asian countries, Jozak is lobbying to change that.

"Out of 20 players on the roster, most of the guys are working in the morning," says the 46-year-old, who worked predominantly in his native Croatia before a brief spell in Poland with Legia Warsaw ended in April last year. "If you don't fall asleep with football on your mind it's tough.

"They asked me what the biggest step we need to take is and I said that the Kuwaiti league has to be full time. They are ambitious. Money is not a problem and they are willing to invest.

"We are aiming for summer 2020 and they are putting a programme forward to the parliament."

Jozak has signed a two-year deal but knows that recovering from exile will take longer.

Having reached the World Cup finals in 1982, Kuwait were second in their 2018 qualifying group before the ban was imposed and their three remaining games – at home to Laos, and away to Myanmar and South Korea – were awarded to the opposition as 3-0 walkovers.

The only competitive

Talented...Kuwait line-up before their friendly against Australia in October

Goal... Abdullah Al Buraiki (right) celebrates scoring against Saudi Arabia in the 2017 Gulf Cup

matches between the imposition of the ban and the next World Cup qualifiers came when Kuwait hosted the Gulf Cup in December 2017.

After international pressure, the Kuwaiti government introduced a new sports law and the national side was readmitted to FIFA on December 6 2017. A day later, Kuwait was awarded the rights to host the Gulf Cup – the move coming about after Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE imposed an economic blockade on original hosts Qatar and refused to send teams.

Before the suspension, Tunisia's Nabil Maaloul had led the national side. For the Gulf Cup, Al Jahra's Serbian coach Boris Bunjak was roped in but the team finished bottom of their group with just one point and a single goal, scored by Abdullah Al Buraiki.

Since arriving, Jozak has sought out a programme of friendlies but says that the results do not reflect Kuwait's real standing.

"They belong to the middle tier in Asia," he says of the current side. "It will take some time but they are not bad.

"They are talented as a football nation. They are agile and aggressive and the touch is good, but sometimes they don't know when to take their foot off the gas.

"We are missing a lot. I don't think to lose 4-0 to Australia [in a friendly in October] is a realistic result. I'm optimistic to make something happen but it will take a solid couple of years. In the future I think that we can compete with the big nations."

How long that will take is hard to tell. WS

➤ both lose games at home, to Leicester City (1-0) and Crystal Palace (3-2) respectively.

PORTUGAL: Jose Gomes quits as Rio Ave coach and becomes boss of English second-tier side Reading.

SPAIN: Real Madrid beat Al Ain 4-1 in the Final to win the Club World Cup in Abu Dhabi.

Sunday December 23

GERMANY: Despite winning four of their last five games, Bayer Leverkusen sack coach Heiko Herrlich and appoint Peter Bosz.

GUINEA: Trailing 3-0 from the away leg in Libya, Horoya beat Al Nasr 6-2 with a 93rd-minute winner from Boniface Haba to clinch a place in the group stage of the CAF Champions League.

USA: MLS champions Atlanta United appoint Frank De Boer as their new head coach.

Tuesday December 25

CHINA: Shanghai Shenhua name Quique Sanchez Flores as coach.

DENMARK: Nicki Bille, a 30-year-old striker who was recently released by Lyngby, is questioned by police in Copenhagen after being shot in the arm in an alleged attempt on his life.

OMAN: Ali Al Habsi will miss the Asian Cup after the goalkeeper suffered an injury while playing for Al Hilal against Al Ahli in a Saudi Premier League game on Friday.

USA: Former LA Galaxy coach Sigi Schmid dies aged 65, weeks after being hospitalised with a heart-related condition.

Old Firm...Rangers' Connor Goldson puts pressure on Celtic

Wednesday December 26

SPAIN: Real Sociedad fire coach Asier Garitano and replace him with reserve-team boss Imanol Alguacil.

Thursday December 27

ITALY: Internazionale are ordered to play two Serie A games behind closed doors after racist chanting during Wednesday's 1-0 victory at home to Napoli.

Friday December 28

AUSTRALIA: Darren Davies takes interim control of Brisbane Roar after John Aloisi resigns with the side ninth in the 10-team A-League, having won just one of their nine games so far.

HOLLAND: Former international defender Jaap Stam is appointed coach of PEC Zwolle.

Saturday December 29

ENGLAND: Roberto Firmino gets a hat-trick as Liverpool beat Arsenal 5-1 at Anfield.

SCOTLAND: Rangers beat Celtic 1-0 to inflict Brendan Rodgers' first defeat as a manager in 13 Old Firm games. In the Edinburgh derby, Hearts win 1-0 at Hibernian.

SPAIN: Kosmos, a company founded by Barcelona defender Gerard Pique, completes a takeover of fifth-tier club side Andorra.

Sunday December 30

ENGLAND: Named in November as Richard Scudamore's replacement as Premier League chief executive, Susanna Dinnage says she will no longer be taking up the position.

Monday December 31

ENGLAND: On the day his 18-month doping ban for using an intravenous drip treatment ends, West Ham sign former France midfielder Samir Nasri, who has been without a club since leaving Turkish club Antalyaspor in January.

FRANCE: Dijon sack Olivier Dall'Oglio and place David Linares in temporary control.

Tuesday January 1

ENGLAND: Sheffield United's Billy Sharp becomes the leading scorer in English league football this century as his goal in a 3-0 win at Wigan Athletic in the Championship takes him to 220 and puts the 32-year-old one clear of former England striker Rickie Lambert.

Wednesday January 2

ARGENTINA: Boca Juniors name former Huracan boss Gustavo Alfaro as their new coach.

ENGLAND: Chelsea sign Borussia Dortmund's Christian Pulisic for £58m and then loan the midfielder back to the German club until the end of the season. Bottom of the Premier League, Huddersfield Town lose 2-1 at home to Burnley to set an unwanted club record of eight successive league defeats.

USA: LA Galaxy appoint former ➤

➤ Boca Juniors boss Guillermo Barros Schelotto as coach.

Thursday January 3

ENGLAND: Manchester City end Liverpool's unbeaten start to the league season with a 2-1 victory.
SPAIN: Santi Cazorla scores twice as Villarreal draw 2-2 with Real Madrid to move out of the relegation zone.

Friday January 4

ENGLAND: Tottenham Hotspur set a new club record for an away victory by winning 7-0 at Tranmere Rovers in the FA Cup.
ITALY: Lucas Paqueta completes his long-awaited move from Flamengo to Milan for a reported fee of €35m.
MEXICO: Argentinian striker Enrique Triverio gets a hat-trick as Toluca kick off the Liga MX Clausura with a 3-1 win at Monarcas Morelia.

Saturday January 5

ASIAN CUP: Bahrain draw 1-1 with hosts UAE in the opening game of the tournament.

Sunday January 6

ASIAN CUP: After the previous day's 4-1 loss to India, Thailand dismiss coach Milovan Rajevac and put his assistant, Sirisak Yodyardthai, in temporary control of the side.
FRANCE: Marseille suffer an embarrassing defeat in the French Cup, losing 2-0 at fourth-tier side Andrezieux.
SPAIN: Real Madrid have Lucas Vazquez sent off as they lose 2-0 at home to Real Sociedad.

Monday January 7

CHINA: Shu Yuhui, who is the owner of Super League side Tianjin Quanjian, is arrested after the death of a young girl with cancer is linked to his company.
MEXICO: Argentinian coach Gerardo "Tata" Martino, who won the 2018 MLS Cup with Atlanta United, takes charge of Mexico's national team.

Tuesday January 8

ASIAN CUP: Vietnam's national-record run of 18 games unbeaten comes to an end as they lose 3-2 to Iraq in Group D.
CAF: It is announced that Egypt will host this year's African Nations Cup. Mohamed Salah retains the African Player of the Year award.
ENGLAND: Harry Kane scores from the penalty spot as Tottenham ➤

Sudamericana Cup

TIM VICKERY

'Athletico' join the big boys

Brazilian side win their first continental title

Brazilian football talks of a "big 12" – the four traditional giants each from Rio and Sao Paulo, plus two each from Porto Alegre and Belo Horizonte. But the time has probably come to now talk of a "big 13", with Atletico Paranaense from Curitiba perhaps earning the right to join the gang after beating Junior of Colombia on penalties to win the Sudamericana Cup.

On the eve of the second leg of the Final the club re-branded themselves, adding an "h" and becoming Athletico in a reversion to the club's original name. It was an attempt to help differentiate themselves from Atletico Mineiro of Belo Horizonte, but it was also a typically bold and forward-thinking move from a club that is not afraid to do things differently.

Their first team, for example, do not take part in their local state championship of Parana, regarding the competition as unnecessary clutter in an overcrowded calendar. And playing on a synthetic pitch in an impressive, modern stadium that was used in the 2014 World Cup, they began last year by appointing Fernando Diniz, a coach whose Pep Guardiola-style emphasis on a possession-based game marks him out as a rarity in Brazilian football.

On the eve of the second leg of the Final the club re-branded themselves, adding an "h" to their name and becoming Athletico

Unfortunately for Diniz, after a brief honeymoon period the club was languishing in the relegation zone of the Brazilian championship and he was replaced by Thiago Nunes in June. While facets of the Diniz style were retained, with the team happy to play out from the back, the side's game became more pragmatic and orthodox. With a slow duo of centre-backs happier operating closer to their own goal, the team was stretched out – but this also left space for the wide men to explode on the counter attack.

The new approach hauled the side up the table and in December they were rewarded with a first continental title.

But victory in the Sudamericana Final didn't

Victorious...the Brazilian side celebrate

On target...Pablo scored in both legs of the Final

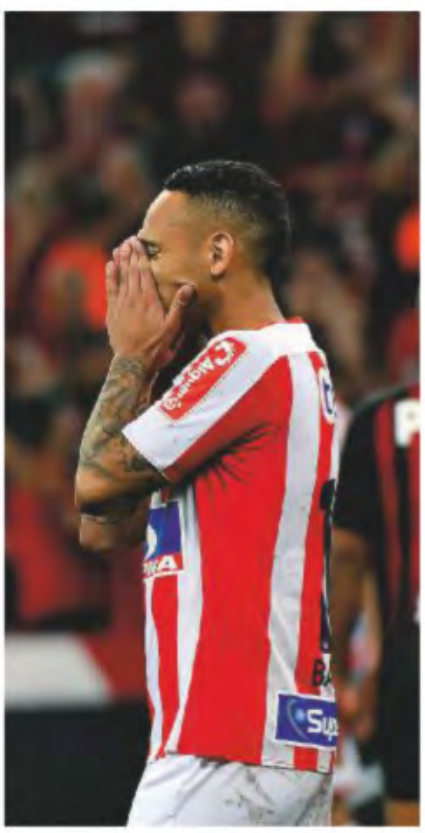
come without a fair bit of luck – and the first slice of fortune came before a ball had even been kicked in Barranquilla, high up on Colombia's Caribbean coast.

Having been harshly sent off in the second leg of their semi-final against fellow Colombian side Sante Fe, Junior's main striker Teo Gutierrez was forced to sit out his team's home leg in the Final. Although Luis Diaz and Yony Gonzalez supply plenty of pace, and left-footed playmaker Jarlan Barrera is an interesting creative force, Gutierrez is the focal point of the attack, bringing subtlety and back-to-goal strength, and without him Junior were not the same force in front of their own fans.

In a rare attack, the visitors took the lead just after half-time when winger Nikao set up centre-forward Pablo. But two minutes later Junior were level when Gonzalez hooked home after the Brazilians failed to deal with a high ball into their box.

The Brazilians then had a huge let off when Junior were awarded a penalty but centre-back Rafael Perez blasted his spot-kick onto the crossbar.

Back in Brazil, the hosts started the return leg well, with Pablo scoring again after a neat combination with Raphael Veiga. With Junior in the middle of a fixture pile-up as they also went in search of the Colombian title, Athletico might have been expected to be the stronger side as the game wore on. But with the home defence sitting very deep, Barrera was afforded space to run the show for Junior and, back from suspension, Gutierrez found plenty of space around the penalty area to cause problems and he headed in a flick-on from a corner to level the scores.



Let off...Jarlan Barrera missed a penalty

Even in extra-time Junior looked the sharper side and they were presented with a golden opportunity to settle matters 10 minutes from time when Gonzalez was brought down by goalkeeper Santos. This time it was Barrera who took the penalty, but his aim was worse than that of Perez the week before and he shot over the bar.

Having also missed a spot-kick in the second leg of their semi-final, Junior approached the shoot-out with understandable trepidation. When Gabriel Fuentes hit the post and Gutierrez shot over it meant that Junior had missed four penalties in the tie without Santos having to make a save. The only Brazilian to miss was the otherwise excellent left-back Renan Lodi, leaving Thiago Heleno to crash home the winning penalty in suitably emphatic style. WS

➤ Hotspur beat Chelsea 1-0 in the League Cup semi-final first leg.

Wednesday January 9

ASIAN CUP: Uzbekistan keeper Ignatiy Nesterov becomes the first person to play in five Asian Cup finals tournaments as his side beat Oman 2-1 in their group opener.
ENGLAND: Manchester City thrash Burton Albion 9-0 at home in the League Cup.
FRANCE: League Cup holders Paris Saint-Germain exit the competition, losing 2-1 to Guingamp, who are bottom of Ligue 1.
GERMANY: France's World Cup-winning defender Benjamin Pavard agrees to join Bayern Munich from Stuttgart when the summer transfer window opens.
SPAIN: Signed from Manchester City, 19-year-old Spanish midfielder Brahim Diaz makes his Real Madrid debut in a 3-0 Spanish Cup win against Leganes.

Thursday January 10

ASIAN CUP: Jordan become the first team to qualify for the knockout stage with a 2-0 victory over Syria, who sack coach Bernd Stange after the game.
FRANCE: Former Paris Saint-Germain boss Antoine Kombouare, who was dismissed by bottom club Guingamp in November, takes charge of Dijon, who are two points adrift of safety in Ligue 1.
NORTHERN IRELAND: Cliftonville striker Jay Donnelly is sentenced to four months in prison for distributing an indecent image of a teenage girl.
SPAIN: Spanish Cup holders Barcelona lose 2-1 at Levante in the first leg of their last-16 tie.

Going through...Jordan (in white)

Friday January 11

USA: It is announced that the MLS coach of the year award will now be

Rep of Ireland

SEAN CREEDON

Bradley plots Rovers revival

But Dundalk will still be the team to beat

Shamrock Rovers are the most successful club in the history of the League of Ireland with a record 17 championship wins and 24 FAI Cup Final victories to their credit, but most of that success happened a long time ago. The Hoops have won the League only twice this century, in 2010 and 2011 and it's now 32 years since a Rovers captain lifted the FAI Cup.

After finishing third – behind Dundalk and Cork City – for the past two seasons, Rovers manager Stephen Bradley must be hoping it could be third time lucky this year.

Bradley joined Arsenal as an apprentice in 2000 but didn't make the breakthrough to the first team. However, he had a good playing career in Scotland and Ireland, and was one of Michael O'Neill's first signings when the current Northern Ireland boss took charge of Shamrock in 2009.

Arsenal's scout in Ireland for a while, Bradley was appointed Rovers' caretaker boss in July 2016, when Pat Fenlon quit, and was officially appointed manager four months later.

The 34-year-old – who is native of Tallaght, where Rovers play their home games – has done a good job in charge, securing Europa League football in his two full seasons in charge. But every time the side has a bad run there are calls of "Bradley out" from fans.

"That's something you get used to," says the Shamrock boss. "The same thing happened when Michael O'Neill was manager here.

"Rovers are the biggest club in Ireland and our supporters are very demanding."

So can Rovers make a serious challenge for the title this season? "I hope so," says Bradley. "Dundalk and Cork are the two clubs we have to try and overtake. Dundalk are probably one of the most dominant teams this league has ever seen.

"When I took over two years ago both Dundalk and Cork were well ahead of us. We had to start from scratch, but I believe we have made good progress on and off the pitch.

"It remains to be seen what effect Stephen Kenny leaving Dundalk to take over as Irish under-21 manager is going to have. People forget that Dundalk have a fantastic group of players. Dundalk head coach Vinny Perth, who worked as assistant manager with Stephen, knows the team very well, they understand how to win and have won a lot together.

"Cork have lost a few players, but manager John Caulfield would have known a few months back that was going to be the case. John has proven that he is a very good operator in the transfer market and I'm sure Cork will be strong again.

Of his own side, Bradley says: "I am happy with the squad we had here last year. This year I have added two new players, Jack Byrne from Kilmarnock and Aaron McEneff from Derry City.

"Jack is an Irish under-21 international, who began with Manchester City and then went on loan to Cambuur, and is a very confident player. What I like

Pressure...Shamrock boss Stephen Bradley with striker Dan Carr

named after the late Sigi Schmid.

Saturday January 12

FRANCE: Paris Saint-Germain extend their unbeaten run to 18 games in Ligue 1 with a 3-0 victory at Amiens and go 13 points clear at the top of the table.
PORTUGAL: Porto fail to set a new national record of 19 consecutive victories in all competitions as they are held to a 0-0 draw at Sporting.

Sunday January 13

ASIAN CUP: Qatar's Almoez Ali equals the finals' record for the most goals in one game as he scores four times in a 6-0 win against North Korea.
ENGLAND: Caretaker boss Ole Gunnar Solskjaer becomes the first manager to win his first five league games in charge of Manchester United as they win 1-0 away to Tottenham Hotspur.
SPAIN: Already the all-time leading scorer in the Spanish top flight, Lionel Messi scores his 400th La Liga goal as Barcelona win 3-0 at home to Eibar.

Monday January 14

ARGENTINA: Cesar Luis Menotti, the coach who led Argentina to victory at the 1978 World Cup, is named director of national teams.
ASIAN CUP: Stephen Constantine resigns as coach following India's exit at the group stage.
BOLIVIA: The winner of a record six Bolivian league titles, Eduardo Villegas is appointed coach of the national team.
ENGLAND: Huddersfield Town manager David Wagner leaves by mutual consent with the club bottom of the Premier League.
PORTUGAL: Benfica's interim coach Bruno Lage is given the job full time after winning both his games in charge as the team rose to second in the Primeira Liga and cut Porto's lead to five points.
UKRAINE: UEFA say Shakhtar Donetsk can stage home games in Kharkiv once again after martial law is lifted in the region.

Tuesday January 15

ENGLAND: Martin O'Neill, who left his role as Republic of Ireland manager in November, takes over at Nottingham Forest.
USA: Austin is set to have its first major professional sports team when a new expansion franchise in the capital of Texas becomes MLS' 27th team in 2021. WS

Strong...Dundalk's Patrick Hoban scores against Shamrock

about him is that he brings that confidence onto the pitch. He doesn't hide, he wants the ball in every area of the pitch.

"Aaron has proved with Derry City what a good player he is. He scores goals and got 13 for a team that struggled last season.

"We are losing our young goalkeeper Gavin Bazunu to Manchester City in May, but for now Gavin is free to play for the club. I hope to make at least one more signing before the start of the league.

"New St Patrick's Athletic manager Harry Kenny has made a few important signings and Waterford, who pushed us for third place last season, will probably bring a few new players also. I think the two clubs who were promoted, UCD and Finn Harps, are stronger than Bray and Limerick who were relegated."

During the close season South Dublin Council, who own Tallaght Stadium, added a third stand – which will give the players and supporters shelter from the winds blowing down from the Dublin mountains. With good facilities now available, Bradley would like to see more fans turning up at Tallaght Stadium on Friday nights.

"We need to get more young people coming to our games" he says. "We have to further improve our facilities and we also need more television coverage for our games. Most young children in Ireland are aware of the Premier League, but we need to show them what the domestic league has to offer." WS

KEY DATES

SEASON STARTS
February 15
SEASON ENDS
October 25

Club football

WORLD

CLUB WORLD CUP

Played in United Arab Emirates

1st round

Dec12 - Al Ain
Al Ain (UAE) 3 (Shiotani 45, Doumbia 49, Berg 85)
Team Wellington (NZ) 3 (Barcia 11, Clapham 15, Ilich 44)
Aet. **HT:** 1-3. **90mins:** 3-3. **Att:** 15,279.
Ref: Sato (Jap)
Al Ain 4-3 on pens
Sent off: M Abdulrahman (Al Ain) 120+1

● *Al Ain qualified for the 2nd round, which Esperance Tunis, Guadalajara & Kashima Antlers entered directly*

2nd round

Dec15 - Al Ain
Kashima Antlers (Jap) 3 (Nagaki 49, Serginho pen 69, Abe 84)
Guadalajara (Mex) 2 (Zaldivar 3, Leo Silva og 90+4)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 3,997. **Ref:** Tessema (Eth)

Dec15 - Al Ain
Esperance Tunis (Tun) 0
Al Ain 3 (M Ahmed 2, El Shahat 16, Al Ahbabi 60)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 21,333. **Ref:** Marrufo (USA)

● *Kashima Antlers & Al Ain qualified for the semi-finals, which River Plate & Real Madrid entered directly; Guadalajara & Esperance Tunis went into the 5th-place match*

5th-place match

Dec18 - Al Ain
Esperance Tunis 1 (Belaili pen 38)
Guadalajara 1 (Sandoval pen 5)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 5,883. **Ref:** Conger (NZ)
Esperance Tunis 6-5 on pens
Sent off: Badri 79, Errabei 90+6 (both Esperance Tunis)

Semi-finals

Dec18 - Al Ain
River Plate (Arg) 2 (Borre 11, 16)
Al Ain 2 (Berg 3, Caio 51)
Aet. **HT:** 2-1. **90mins:** 2-2. **Att:** 21,383.
Ref: Rocchi (Ita)
Al Ain 5-4 on pens
River Plate: Armani - Montiel, Maidana, Pinola, Casco, Fernandez (Quintero 55), Ponzio (De la Cruz 87), Palacios (Perez 55), G Martinez (Scocco 91), Borre, Pratto.
Al Ain: Eisa - M Ahmed, I Ahmed, Fayez, Shiotani, M Abdulrahman (Yaslam 64), Barman (A Abdulrahman 82), Doumbia (Nader 107), El Shahat, Berg (Al Ahbabi 75), Caio.

Dec19 - Abu Dhabi
Kashima Antlers 1 (Doi 78)
Real Madrid (Spa) 3 (Bale 44, 53, 55)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 30,554. **Ref:** Sampaio (Bra)
Kashima Antlers: Kwoun - Nishi (Anzai 56), Jung, Shoji, Yamamoto, Endo (Leandro 81), Nagaki (Uchida 46), Leo Silva, Abe, Doi, Serginho.
Real Madrid: Courtois - Carvajal, Varane, Sergio Ramos, Marcelo, Llorente, Lucas Vazquez (Isco 68), Modric, Kroos, Bale (Marco Asensio 60; Casemiro 74), Benzema.

3rd-place match

Dec 22 - Abu Dhabi
Kashima Antlers 0
River Plate 4 (Zuculini 24, G Martinez 73, 90+3, Borre pen 89)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 13,550. **Ref:** Rocchi (Ita)
Kashima Antlers: Kwoun (Sogahata 23) - Uchida (Ogasawara 76), Jung, Inukai, Anzai, Endo (Nishi 65), Nagaki, Leo Silva, Abe, Doi, Serginho.
River Plate: Lux - Moreira (Quintero 46), L Martinez, Pinola, Casco, Zuculini, De la Cruz (G Martinez 69), Palacios (Fernandez 46), Mayada, Alvarez, Borre.

Final

Dec 22 - Abu Dhabi
Real Madrid 4 (Modric 14, Llorente 60, Sergio Ramos 79, Nader og 90+1)
Al Ain 1 (Shiotani 86)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 40,696. **Ref:** Marrufo (USA)
Real Madrid: Courtois - Carvajal, Varane, Sergio Ramos, Marcelo, Modric, Llorente (Casemiro 82), Kroos (Dani Ceballos 71), Lucas Vazquez (Vinicius Junior 84), Benzema, Bale.
Al Ain: Eisa - M Ahmed (Al Ahbabi 64), I Ahmed, Fayez, Shiotani, Doumbia, M Abdulrahman (A Abdulrahman 67), El Shahat, Caio, Yaslam, Berg (Nader 75).

AFRICA

CAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round

1st legs - Nov 27/28; 2nd legs - Dec 4/5
Al Hilal Omdurman (Sud) v JKU (Zan)
4-0, 2-0 (agg 6-0)
Al Merreikh Omdurman (Sud) v Vipers (Uga)
2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2, Vipers on away goals)
Al Nasr (Lby) v Al Hilal Wau (SSu)
5-1, 4-2 (agg 9-3)
APR (Rwa) v Club Africain (Tun)
0-0, 1-3 (agg 1-3)
ASAS Djibouti Telecom (Dji) v Jimma Aba Jifar (Eth)
1-3, 2-2 (agg 3-5)
ASEC Abidjan (IvC) v Mangasport (Gab)
1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
ASF Bobo Dioulasso (BuF) v Coton Sport (Cam)
3-1, 1-3 (agg 4-4, Coton Sport 5-3 on pens)
CNaPS (Mad) v FC Platinum (Zim)
1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
CS Constantine (Alg) v Gamtel (Gam)
0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0)
Gor Mahia (Ken) v Big Bullets (Mwi)
1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Gor Mahia 4-3 on pens)
Horoya (Gui) v Barrack Young Controllers (Lbr)
1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0)
Ittihad Tanger (Mor) v Elect Sport (Chd)
1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Jaraaf (Sen) v Koroki (Tog)
1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, Jaraaf 4-2 on pens)
JS Saoura (Alg) v SC Gagnoa (IvC)
2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0)
Le Messager Ngozi (Bdi) v Ismaily (Egy)
0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3)
Leones Vegetarianos (EqG) v
Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf) 0-2, 1-5 (agg 1-7)
Nouadhibou (Mra) v Al Ahly Benghazi (Lby)
2-1, 0-2 (agg 2-3)
Orlando Pirates (SAf) v Lightstars (Sey)
5-1, 3-1 (agg 8-2)
Primeiro Agosto (Ang) v AS Otoho (Con)
4-2, 0-2 (agg 4-4, AS Otoho on away goals)
Simba (Tan) v Mbabane Swallows (Esw/Swa)
4-1, 4-0 (agg 8-1)
Sonidep (Nig) v Zesco United (Zam)
1-2, 0-3 (agg 1-5)
Stade Centrafricaine (CAR) v Stade Malien (Mli)
0-1, 0-4 (agg 0-5)
Township Rollers (Bot) v Bantu (Les)
1-1, 1-1 (agg 2-2, Bantu 4-2 on pens)
UMS Loum (Cam) v Lobi Stars (Nga)
1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2)
Uniao Songo (Moz) v Nkana (Zam)
1-2, 0-1 (agg 1-3)
Volcan (Com) v African Stars (Nam)
0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2)

Byes to 1st round: *Al Ahly (Egy), AS Vita (DRC), TP Mazembe (DRC), Wydad Casablanca (Mor)*

Bye to group stage: *Esperance Tunis (Tun, holders)*

1st round

1st legs - Dec14-16; 2nd legs - Dec 22/23
Al Ahly (Egy) v Jimma Aba Jifar 2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1)
Al Ahly Benghazi v Mamelodi Sundowns
0-0, 0-4 (agg 0-4)
Al Nasr v Horoya 3-0, 2-6 (agg 5-6)
AS Otoho v FC Platinum
1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, FC Platinum on away goals)
AS Vita v Bantu 4-1, 1-1 (agg 5-2)
Club Africain v Al Hilal Omdurman
3-1, 0-1 (agg 3-2)
CS Constantine v Vipers 1-0, 2-0 (agg 3-0)
Gor Mahia v Lobi Stars
3-1, 0-2 (agg 3-3, Lobi Stars on away goals)
Ismaily v Coton Sport 2-0, 1-2 (agg 3-2)
JS Saoura v Ittihad Tanger 2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1)
Nkana v Simba 2-1, 1-3 (agg 3-4)
Orlando Pirates v African Stars 0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0)
Stade Malien v ASEC Abidjan 0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2)
TP Mazembe v Zesco United 1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1)
Wydad Casablanca v Jaraaf 2-0, 1-3
(agg 3-3, Wydad Casablanca on away goals)

● *Winning teams qualified for the group stage; losing teams enter the Confederation Cup*

CONFEDERATION CUP

Preliminary round

1st legs - Nov 27/28; 2nd legs - Dec 4/5
Al Ahli Shendi (Sud) v AS Nyuki (DRC)
1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, AS Nyuki 3-1 on pens)
Bel Abbes (Alg) v LISCR (Lbr) 4-0, 0-1 (agg 4-1)
CMS (Gab) v Silver Strikers (Mwi)
1-0, 0-1 (agg 1-1, CMS 4-3 on pens)
Coton Tchad (Chd) v Gomido (Tog)
2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1)
Elgeco (Mad) v Deportivo Unidad (EqG)
3-1, 1-2 (agg 4-3)
Enugu Rangers (Nga) v Defence Force (Eth)
2-0, 3-1 (agg 5-1)
Free State Stars (SAf) v Mukura Victory (Rwa)
0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)
Generation Foot (Sen) v Djoliba (Mli)
0-0, 1-0 (agg 1-0)
Green Buffaloes (Zam) v Al Merreikh Juba (SSu)
2-0, 0-0 (agg 2-0)
Green Eagles (Zam) v Young Buffaloes (Esw/Swa)
2-0, 3-2 (agg 5-2)
Hassania Agadir (Mor) v GNN (Nig)
4-0, 0-0 (agg 4-0)
Hussein Dey (Alg) v Diables Noirs (Con)
2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1)
Kaizer Chiefs (SAf) v Zimamoto (Zan)
4-0, 1-2 (agg 5-2)
Kariobangi Sharks (Ken) v Arta (Dji)
6-1, 3-0 (agg 9-1)
Motema Pembe (DRC) v Les Anges (CAR)
4-1, 1-1 (agg 5-2)
Mtibwa Sugar (Tan) v Northern Dynamo (Sey)
4-0, 1-0 (agg 5-0)
New Star (Cam) v Vital'O (Bdi) 0-0, 4-1 (agg 4-1)
Nouakchott King's (Mra) v Stade Abidjan (IvC)
1-2, 1-0 (agg 2-2, Std Abidjan on away goals)
Petro Atletico (Ang) v Orapa United (Bot)
4-0, 2-0 (agg 6-0)
Salitas (BuF) v Wakriya (Gui)
2-0, 1-3 (agg 3-3, Salitas on away goals)
San Pedro (IvC) v Armed Forces (Gam)
1-1, 1-0 (agg 2-1)

Asante Kotoko (Gha) v Eding Sport (Cam)
– *Asante Kotoko walkover, as Eding Sport were not confirmed as Cameroon's 2nd representatives in the tournament by the deadline*

Miracle (Com) v Al Ittihad Tripoli (Lby) –
Al Ittihad Tripoli walkover; Miracle withdrew before 2nd leg (Al Ittihad Tripoli won1st leg 8-0)

Byes to 1st round: *Al Ahli Tripoli (Lby), Al Hilal Obeid (Sud), Al Masry (Egy), CS Sfaxien (Tun), Etoile Sahel (Tun), KCCA (Uga), Raja Casablanca (Mor, holders), RS Berkane (Mor), Zamalek (Egy)*

1st round

1st legs - Dec14-16; 2nd legs - Dec 21-23
Al Ahli Tripoli v New Star
1-1, 0-0 (agg 1-1, New Star on away goals)
Al Hilal Obeid v Mukura Victory 0-0, 0-0
(agg 0-0, Mukura Victory 5-4 on pens)
Al Masry v Salitas 0-2, 0-0 (agg 0-2)
AS Nyuki v Petro Atletico 0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2)
Bel Abbes v Enugu Rangers 0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
CS Sfaxien v Green Buffaloes 4-1, 0-1 (agg 4-2)
Etoile Sahel v Stade Abidjan 3-0, 0-1 (agg 3-1)[1]
Green Eagles v Hussein Dey 0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2)
Hassania Agadir v Generation Foot 2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1)
Kaizer Chiefs v Elgeco 3-0, 3-0 (agg 6-0)
Kariobangi Sharks v Asante Kotoko
0-0, 1-2 (agg 1-2)
KCCA v Mtibwa Sugar 3-0, 2-1 (agg 5-1)
Motema Pembe v San Pedro 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3)
Raja Casablanca v CMS 5-0, 0-1 (agg 5-1)
RS Berkane v Al Ittihad Tripoli 3-0, 1-0 (agg 4-0)
Zamalek v Coton Tchad 7-0, 0-2 (agg 7-2)
[1]*Etoile Sahel gained direct entry to the group stage - bypassing the play-off round - as the1st round winner with the best CAF 5-year ranking*

CHAD

2018 Championship Final

Oct 7: Coton Tchad 1 Elect Sport 1 (Elect Sport 4-3 on pens).

MALAWI

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Big Bullets (C)	30	21	8	1	55	13	71
Be Forward	30	18	9	3	48	18	63
Silver Strikers	30	15	12	3	40	18	57
M Security	30	11	9	10	30	32	42
Civil Sporting	30	11	9	10	35	38	42
Kamuzu B'ks	30	9	11	10	26	33	38
Karonga Utd	30	9	10	11	34	36	37
Mzuni	30	9	9	12	25	25	36
TN Stars	30	9	9	12	37	45	36
Azam Tigers	30	9	8	13	38	40	35
Blue Eagles	30	9	8	13	31	33	35
Dwangwa Utd	30	9	8	13	35	44	35
Moyale B'ks	30	8	11	11	32	41	35
Red Lions (R)	30	7	12	11	28	37	33
MAFCO (R)	30	6	11	13	28	38	29
Nchalo Utd[1] (R)	30	4	8	18	18	49	17

[1]*3pts deducted for attempted match-fixing*

REUNION

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts[1]
St-Pierroise (C)	26	18	5	3	61	13	85
Jeanne d'Arc	26	18	4	4	35	14	84
Excelsior	26	14	6	6	49	22	74
St-Denis	26	11	8	7	40	26	67
Ste-Marienne[2]	26	10	10	6	27	24	65
Tamponnaise	26	11	4	11	27	29	63
St-Louisienne	26	9	8	9	31	35	61
Ste-Suzanne	26	7	11	8	30	30	58
Marsouins	26	7	8	11	19	33	55
St-Pauloise	26	8	5	13	27	47	55
St-Louis	26	7	7	12	19	36	54
Capricorne[3]	26	5	10	11	15	28	51
Petite-Ile (R)	26	4	7	15	26	36	45
OSCA Leo's (R)	26	4	5	17	22	55	43

[1]*4pts for a win, 2pts for a draw, 1pt for a loss*
[2]*1pt deducted*
[3]*Stay in top division after winning rel/prom play-off*

SAO TOME E PRINCIPE

2018 National Championship Final

1st leg - Dec 8; 2nd leg - Dec15
Porto Real v UDRA 2-2, 1-2 (agg 3-4)

SEYCHELLES

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cote d'Or (C)	22	15	5	2	60	22	50
Red Star DF	22	14	7	1	51	21	49
Lightstars	22	15	3	4	41	21	48
St Louis Suns	22	11	7	4	44	23	40
St Michel Utd	22	12	3	7	53	27	39
La Passe	22	10	6	6	41	34	36
Foresters	22	7	7	8	28	27	28
Anse Reunion	22	7	2	13	32	41	23
Revengers	22	4	5	13	28	60	17
Nthn Dynamo	22	4	3	15	31	56	15
Au Cap[1]	22	4	3	15	25	59	15
The Lions (R)	22	3	1	18	15	58	10

[1]*Stay in top division after winning rel/prom play-off*

SOUTH AMERICA

LIBERTADORES CUP

Group stage draw

Group A
Alianza Lima (Per), Internacional (Bra), River Plate (Arg), *final qualifying round winner*
Group B
Cruzeiro (Bra), Deportivo Lara (Ven), Emelec (Ecu), Huracan (Arg)
Group C
Godoy Cruz (Arg), Olimpia (Par), Sporting Cristal (Per), Universidad de Concepcion (Chl)
Group D
Flamengo (Bra), LDU Quito (Ecu), Penarol (Uru), San Jose (Bol)
Group E
Cerro Porteno (Par), Nacional (Uru), Zamora (Ven), *final qualifying round winner*
Group F
Junior (Col), Palmeiras (Bra), San Lorenzo (Arg), *final qualifying round winner*
Group G
Athletico Paranaense (Bra), Boca Juniors (Arg), Jorge Wilstermann (Bol), Tolima (Col)
Group H
Gremio (Bra), Rosario Central (Arg), Universidad Catolica (Chl), *final qualifying round winner*

Matchdays: *Mar 5-7, Mar12-14, Mar 26-28, Apr 9-11, Apr 23-25, May 7-9*

● *The top 2 in each group will qualify for the1st knockout round (last16); the 3rd-placed teams will enter the Sudamericana Cup*

SUDAMERICANA CUP

1st round draw

Argentinos Juniors (Arg) v
Estudiantes de Merida (Ven)
Bahia (Bra) v Liverpool (Uru)
Botafogo (Bra) v Defensa y Justicia (Arg)
Corinthians (Bra) v Racing (Arg)
Deportivo Cali (Col) v Guarani (Par)
Deportivo Municipal (Per) v Colon (Arg)
Deportivo Santani (Par) v Once Caldas (Col)
Fluminense (Bra) v Antofagasta (Chl)
Independiente (Arg) v Deportivo Binacional (Per)
Independiente (Par) v La Equidad (Col)
Macara (Ecu) v Guabira (Bol)
Mineros (Ven) v Sol de America (Par)
Montevideo Wanderers (Uru) v
Sport Huancayo (Per)
Nacional Potosi (Bol) v Zulia (Ven)
Rionegro Aguilas (Col) v Oriente Petrolero (Bol)
River Plate (Uru) v Santos (Bra)
Royal Pari (Bol) v Monagas (Ven)
Union (Arg) v Independiente del Valle (Ecu)
Union Espanola (Chl) v Mushuc Runa (Ecu)
Union La Calera (Chl) v Chapecoense (Bra)
Universidad Catolica (Ecu) v Colo Colo (Chl)
UT Cajamarca (Per) v Cerro (Uru)
1st legs - Feb 5-Apr 4; 2nd legs - Feb19-May 2

BOLIVIA

2018 – CLAUSURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
San Jose (C)	26	17	2	7	71	38	53
The Strongest	26	16	2	8	65	29	50
Royal Pari	26	15	5	6	52	34	50
Bolivar	26	15	2	9	72	45	47
Wilstermann	26	13	5	8	42	30	44
Sport Boys	26	12	5	9	44	47	41
Nacional	26	11	5	10	43	40	38
Oriente	26	11	5	10	27	32	38
Blooming	26	10	6	10	41	43	36
Guabira	26	9	3	14	37	48	30
Aurora	26	8	3	15	25	40	27
Real Potosi	26	6	4	16	30	68	22
Univ'tario[1] (R)[2]	26	6	5	15	18	50	20
Destroyers[3]	26	4	6	16	22	45	18

[1]3pts deducted for failing to pay a debt to a former manager
[2]Relegated because they finished bottom of the 2018 apertura/clausura aggregate table
[3]Finished 2nd bottom in the 2018 apertura/clausura aggregate table, meaning they had to go into a rel/prom play-off, which they won to stay in the top division

COLOMBIA

2018 – CLAUSURA: REGULAR – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tolima (Q)	19	12	3	4	34	22	39
Once C'das (Q)	19	10	6	3	25	16	36
La Equidad (Q)	19	11	3	5	23	15	36
Buc'manga (Q)	19	11	2	6	25	20	35
Ind Medellin (Q)	19	9	7	3	29	19	34
Junior (Q)	19	9	5	5	32	17	32
Rionegro (Q)	19	9	5	5	21	19	32
Santa Fe (Q)	19	8	7	4	27	13	31
Atl Nacional	19	8	6	5	27	20	30
Dep Cali	19	8	5	6	19	15	29
Millonarios	19	6	7	6	23	23	25
America	19	6	7	6	19	20	25
Envigado	19	5	5	9	20	28	20
Chico (R)[1]	19	5	5	9	19	28	20
Patriotas	19	5	5	9	17	26	20
Al Petrolera	19	6	1	12	22	33	19
Atl Huila	19	4	6	9	13	22	18
Dep Pasto	19	3	6	10	11	21	15
Jaguares	19	3	5	11	13	29	14
Leones (R)[1]	19	1	6	12	15	28	9

The top 8 qualified for the clausura quarter-finals
[1]The 2 teams with the lowest points-per-game average over the 3 most recent seasons were relegated

Quarter-finals
1st legs - Nov14/15; 2nd legs - Nov17/18
Independiente Medellin v Bucaramanga
3-0, 0-2 (agg 3-2)
Junior v La Equidad 1-0, 0-0 (agg 1-0)
Rionegro Aguilas v Once Caldas
1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1)
Santa Fe v Tolima
1-2, 1-0 (agg 2-2, Tolima 4-3 on pens)

Semi-finals
1st legs - Nov 21/22; 2nd legs - Nov 25
Independiente Medellin v Tolima
2-2, 2-0 (agg 4-2)
Rionegro Aguilas v Junior 2-3, 1-1 (agg 3-4)

2018 Clausura Final
1st leg - Dec 8; 2nd leg - Dec16
Junior v Independiente Medellin 4-1, 1-3 (agg 5-4)

ECUADOR

2018 – 2ND STAGE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Emelec (Q)	22	12	5	5	35	17	41
Macara	22	10	8	4	31	24	38
LDU Quito	22	9	10	3	32	19	37
Delfin	22	9	9	4	34	22	36
Barcelona	22	9	8	5	28	21	35
Independiente	22	9	6	7	31	24	33
Aucas	22	10	3	9	25	25	33
Univ Catolica	22	8	3	11	29	32	27
Tecnico Univ	22	8	3	11	33	38	27
Cuenca	22	6	5	11	23	31	23
El Nacional	22	3	7	12	29	47	16
Guayaquil City	22	3	5	14	19	49	14

As winners, Emelec qualified for the 2018 Overall Championship Final

2018 Overall Championship Final
(1st stage winners, LDU Quito v 2nd stage winners, Emelec)
1st leg - Dec12; 2nd leg - Dec16
Emelec v LDU Quito 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)

PERU

2018 – CLAUSURA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Melgar (Q)	15	9	3	3	21	13	30
Alianza Lima	15	8	3	4	20	14	27
Ayacucho	15	7	5	3	30	25	26
Universitario[1]	15	8	2	5	20	17	25
Sp Cristal	15	7	3	5	37	14	24
U Comercio	15	7	2	6	29	25	23
U San Martin	15	6	4	5	20	20	22
Real Garcilaso	15	5	6	4	26	22	21
Ac Cantolao[2]	15	7	1	7	18	22	20
Dep Municipal[1]	15	6	3	6	15	19	20
Sport Boys	15	5	3	7	21	23	18
Comerc's[1] (R)[4]	15	5	3	7	15	19	17
Dep Binacional	15	5	2	8	14	25	17
UT Cajamarca[1]	15	4	5	6	14	14	16
Sp Huancayo	15	3	7	5	19	22	16
S Rosario[3] (R)[4]	15	1	2	12	10	35	2

As winners, Melgar qualified for the 2018 Overall Championship Play-offs
[1]1pt deducted [2]2pts deducted [3]3pts deducted – all for not paying an outstanding debt
[4]The 2 teams with fewest points in the 2018 season aggregate table were relegated

2018 Overall Championship Play-offs

Semi-final
(Alianza Lima, as highest-placed team in the 2018 season aggregate table that didn't also win one of the 3 2018 season tournaments; Melgar, as clausura winners)
1st leg - Dec 2; 2nd leg - Dec 6
Alianza Lima v Melgar 3-3, 2-2
(agg 5-5, Alianza Lima 2-0 on pens)

Final
(Sporting Cristal made direct entry to the Final as the winner of the 2 other 2018 season tournaments, the verano & the apertura)
1st leg - Dec12; 2nd leg - Dec16
Alianza Lima v Sporting Cristal 1-4, 0-3 (agg 1-7)

CONCACAF

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st round draw

Alianza (ESv) v Monterrey (Mex)
Atletico Pantoja (DoR) v
New York Red Bulls (USA)
Guastatoya (Gtm) v Houston Dynamo (USA)
Herediano (CR) v Atlanta United (USA)
Independiente (Pan) v Toronto (Can)
Marathon (Hnd) v Santos Laguna (Mex)
Saprissa (CR) v Tigres UANL (Mex)
Sporting Kansas City (USA) v Toluca (Mex)
1st legs - Feb19-21; 2nd legs - Feb 26-28

BELIZE

2018-19 Opening Final
1st leg - Dec16; 2nd leg - Dec 22
Verdes v Belmopan Bandits 2-4, 2-1 (agg 4-5)

COSTA RICA

2018-19 Apertura Final
1st leg - Dec16; 2nd leg - Dec 23
Herediano v Saprissa 2-2, 3-2 (aet) (agg 5-4)

EL SALVADOR

2018-19 Apertura Final
Dec 16: Alianza 1 Santa Tecla 2.

GUATEMALA

2018-19 Apertura Final
1st leg - Dec12; 2nd leg - Dec15
Comunicaciones v Guastatoya 1-2, 1-1 (agg 2-3)

HAITI

2018 Cloture (closing) Final
1st leg - Dec 20; 2nd leg - Dec 23; play-off - Dec 27
Don Bosco v Arcahaie 0-0, 0-0 (aet) (agg 0-0, 2nd leg abandoned at 5-5 on pens because of lack of light)
Play-off: Arcahaie 1 Don Bosco 2.

HONDURAS

2018-19 Apertura Final
1st leg - Dec 9; 2nd leg - Dec16
Olimpia v Motagua 0-2, 1-0 (agg 1-2)

MEXICO

2018-19 – APERTURA: REGULAR – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Cruz Azul (Q)	17	11	3	3	26	13	36
America (Q)	17	9	6	2	33	17	33
Pumas (Q)	17	8	6	3	29	19	30
Santos (Q)	17	8	6	3	27	18	30
Monterrey (Q)	17	9	3	5	25	19	30
Tigres (Q)	17	8	5	4	32	18	29
Toluca (Q)	17	8	2	7	27	22	26
Queretaro (Q)	17	7	5	5	19	20	26
Morelia	17	7	4	6	23	26	25
Pachuca	17	6	6	5	26	18	24
Guadalajara	17	5	5	7	21	22	20
Puebla	17	5	5	7	23	30	20
Lobos	17	5	4	8	21	25	19
Leon	17	5	3	9	18	23	18
Tijuana	17	4	5	8	13	24	17
Necaxa	17	3	5	9	19	29	14
Atlas	17	2	5	10	11	27	11
Veracruz	17	2	4	11	17	40	10

The top 8 qualified for the apertura quarter-finals

Quarter-finals
1st legs - Nov 28/29; 2nd legs - Dec1/2
Monterrey v Santos Laguna 1-0, 2-0 (agg 3-0)
Queretaro v Cruz Azul 0-2, 1-1 (agg 1-3)
Tigres v Pumas UNAM 2-1, 1-3 (agg 3-4)
Toluca v America 2-2, 2-3 (agg 4-5)

Semi-finals
1st legs - Dec 5/6; 2nd legs - Dec 8/9
Monterrey v Cruz Azul 1-0, 0-1
(agg 1-1, Cruz Azul went through on better regular-season record)
Pumas UNAM v America 1-1, 1-6 (agg 2-7)

2018-19 Apertura Final
1st leg - Dec13; 2nd leg - Dec16
America v Cruz Azul 0-0, 2-0 (agg 2-0)

NICARAGUA

2018-19 Apertura Final
1st leg - Dec 8; 2nd leg - Dec15
Real Esteli v Managua 0-0, 0-1 (aet) (agg 0-1)

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
W Connect'n (C)	18	10	7	1	43	8	37
Central	18	11	3	4	42	25	36
Club Sando	18	10	3	5	44	26	33
Police	18	10	3	5	37	21	33
Defence Force	18	9	3	6	38	21	30
Caledonia Utd	18	8	6	4	36	22	30
SJ Jabloteh	18	8	3	7	29	24	27
Point Fortin	18	3	2	13	20	46	11
St Ann's	18	3	1	14	13	67	10
NE Stars	18	1	3	14	16	58	6

ASIA

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group stage draw

Group A
Al Wasl (UAE), Al Zawraa (Irq), *final qualifying round winner, final qualifying round winner*
Group B
Al Ittihad (Sau), Al Wahda (UAE), Lokomotiv Tashkent (Uzb), *final qualifying round winner*
Group C
Al Ain (UAE), Al Duhail (Qat), Al Hilal (Sau), Esteghlal Tehran (Irn)
Group D
Al Ahli (Sau), Al Sadd (Qat), Persepolis (Irn), *final qualifying round winner*
Group E
Gyeongnam (SKo), Johor Darul Ta'zim (Mly), *final qualifying round winner, final qualifying round winner*
Group F
Daegu (SKo), Guangzhou Evergrande (Chn), Melbourne Victory (Aus), *final qualifying round winner*
Group G
Beijing Guoan (Chn), Buriram United (Tha), Jeonbuk Motors (SKo), Urawa Red Diamonds (Jap)
Group H
Kawasaki Frontale (Jap), Shanghai SIPG (Chn), Sydney (Aus), *final qualifying round winner*

Matchdays: *Mar 4-6, Mar11-13, Apr 8-10, Apr 22-24, May 6-8, May 20-22*

● *The top 2 in each group will qualify for the1st knockout round (last16)*

MALDIVES

2018 – NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
TC Sports (C)	16	13	0	3	52	12	39
Eagles	16	12	2	2	62	12	38
Maziya	16	12	2	2	51	17	38
New Radiant	16	8	4	4	44	22	28
Green Streets	16	8	2	6	35	29	26
Nilandhoo	16	4	1	11	20	60	13
Foakaidhoo	16	3	3	10	16	39	12
Victory	16	2	4	10	10	36	10
Fehendhoo (R)	9	1	1	7	2	30	4
Thim'fushi (R)	9	0	1	8	2	37	1

The bottom 2 after the 9-round first stage were relegated and took no further part in the season; the top 8 played each other again once in the 7-round second stage

PAKISTAN

2018-19 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
KRL (C)	26	14	9	3	40	12	51
Air Force	26	14	9	3	40	13	51
SSGC	26	15	5	6	32	16	50
Army	26	12	10	4	38	19	46
WAPDA	26	13	6	7	32	18	45
K-Electric	26	10	11	5	30	21	41
PCAA	26	11	6	9	31	27	39
National Bank	26	9	6	11	27	27	33
Navy	26	10	3	13	30	37	33
Muslim	26	5	13	8	16	17	28
Afghan	26	8	4	14	24	44	28
SNGPL	26	3	14	9	28	33	23
K Port Trust (R)	26	4	6	16	19	46	18
Baloch (R)	26	0	6	20	12	69	6
ASM[1] (R)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

[1]Withdrew mid-season; results annulled

OCEANIA

OFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Qualifying stage entrants

Kiwi (Soa), Lotoha'apai United (Ton), Pago Youth (AmS), Tupapa Maraerenga (Coo)
To be played as a round-robin group fromJan 26 to Feb1; the top 2 qualify for the group stage

Group stage draw

Group A
Hienghene Sport (NwC), Malampa Revivors (Van), Tefana (Tah), Toti City (PNG)
Group B
Central Sport (Tah), Henderson Eels (Sol), Lautoka (Fij), Morobe Wawens (PNG)
Group C
Ba (Fij), Erakor Golden Star (Van), Team Wellington (NZ), *qualifying stage runner-up*

Group D
Auckland City (NZ), Magenta (NwC), Solomon Warriors (Sol), *qualifying stage winner*

Games to be played in February & March

● *The top 2 in each group will qualify for the quarter-finals*

AMERICAN SAMOA

2018 Championship Final
Dec 6: Pago Youth 3 Utulei Youth 2.

SAMOA (Upolu Premier)

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kiwi (C)	21	17	3	1	133	18	54
Lupe Ole Soaga	21	17	3	1	107	10	54
Vaipuna	21	12	5	4	75	34	41
Moaula Utd	21	11	6	4	78	34	39
Vaitele Uta	21	10	5	6	56	40	35
Vaivase-Tai	21	9	3	9	52	55	30
Lepea	21	9	2	10	64	56	29
Vaiusu	21	6	6	9	42	61	24
Moata'a	21	6	1	14	37	82	19
Togafuafua	21	5	1	15	44	106	16
ADIDAS	21	1	1	19	14	137	4
Vaimoso[1] (R)	11	0	0	11	6	75	0

[1]Excluded for not showing up for games 3 times, having already played 6 times (all defeats); the remaining 5 games of the first round of11 games were awarded as 3-0 wins to their scheduled opponents

SOLOMON ISLANDS

2018 – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
S Warriors (C)	14	9	3	2	49	15	30
Henderson Eels	14	9	3	2	48	22	30
Kossa	14	6	5	3	30	22	23
Malaita Kingz	14	6	3	5	28	27	21
Western Utd	14	6	1	7	29	31	19
Marist	14	5	2	7	27	31	17
Kakamora	14	4	4	6	27	40	16
Guadalcanal	14	0	1	13	14	64	1

EUROPE

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

1st knockout round (last 16) draw
Ajax (Hol) v Real Madrid (Spa)
(Feb 13 & Mar 5)
Atletico Madrid (Spa) v Juventus (Ita)
(Feb 20 & Mar 12)
Liverpool (Eng) v Bayern Munich (Ger)
(Feb 19 & Mar 13)
Lyon (Fra) v Barcelona (Spa)
(Feb 19 & Mar 13)
Manchester Utd (Eng) v Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
(Feb 12 & Mar 6)
Roma (Ita) v Porto (Por)
(Feb 12 & Mar 6)
Schalke (Ger) v Manchester City (Eng)
(Feb 20 & Mar 12)
Tottenham (Eng) v Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
(Feb 13 & Mar 5)

EUROPA LEAGUE

1st knockout round (last 32) draw
(*3rd-placed teams in the Champions League groups enter at this stage*)
BATE Borisov (Bls) v Arsenal (Eng)
Celtic (Sco) v Valencia (Spa)
Club Brugge (Blg) v Salzburg (Aut)
Fenerbahce (Tur) v Zenit St Petersburg* (Rus)
Galatasaray (Tur) v Benfica (Por)
Krasnodar (Rus) v Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
Lazio (Ita) v Sevilla** (Spa)
Malmo (Swe) v Chelsea (Eng)
Olympiakos (Gre) v Dynamo Kiev (Ukr)
Rapid Vienna (Aut) v Internazionale (Ita)
Rennes (Fra) v Real Betis (Spa)
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) v Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
Slavia Prague (CzR) v Genk (Blg)
Sporting Lisbon (Por) v Villarreal (Spa)
Viktoria Plzen (CzR) v Dinamo Zagreb (Cro)
Zurich (Swi) v Napoli (Ita)
*1st legs - Feb14 (*Feb12);*
*2nd legs - Feb 21 (**Feb 20)*

Internationals

FRIENDLIES

Thursday, December 13
Dec13 - Muscat
Oman 2 (Mohammed Al Ghassani 74, M Saleh 76)
Tajikistan 1 (Solehov 90)
HT: 0-0

Sunday, December 16
Dec16 - Muscat
Oman 1 (Al Hajri 58)
Tajikistan 0
HT: 0-0

Dec16 - Doha, Qatar
Palestine 2 (Dabbagh 24, Maraaba 29)
Pakistan 0
HT: 2-0

Thursday, December 20
Dec 20 - Riffa
Bahrain 5 (Al Romaihi 29, Rashid pen 43, 75, Madan 61, Al Husaini 85)
Tajikistan 0
HT: 2-0

Dec 20 - Doha, Qatar
Jordan 0
Kyrgyzstan 1 (Rustamov 86)
HT: 0-0

Sunday, December 23
Dec 23 - Doha
Qatar 2 (Almoez Ali 31, Alaaeldin 90+2)
Jordan 0
HT: 1-0

Monday, December 24
Dec 24 - Doha, Qatar
Iraq 2 (Ibrahim 22, M Ali 69)
China 1 (Wu Lei 43)
HT: 1-1

Dec 24 - Doha, Qatar
Palestine 1 (Cantillana 90+1)
Iran 1 (Taremi 50)
HT: 0-0

Tuesday, December 25
Dec 25 - Antalya, Turkey
Afghanistan 0
Turkmenistan 2 (Orazsahedow 48, Annagulyyew 51)
HT: 0-0

Dec 25 - Doha
Qatar 1 (Ali Afif 69)
Kyrgyzstan 0
HT: 0-0

Dec 25 - Hanoi
Vietnam 1 (Nguyen Tien Linh 55)
North Korea 1 (Jong Il-gwan 82)
HT: 0-0

Thursday, December 27
Dec 27 - Riffa
Bahrain 1 (Habib pen 47)
Lebanon 0
HT: 0-0

Dec 27 - Abu Dhabi
Oman 0
India 0

Dec 27 - Doha
Qatar 0
Algeria 1 (Bounedjah 57)
HT: 0-0

Friday, December 28
Dec 28 - Doha, Qatar
Jordan 1 (Al Tamaari 36)
China 1 (Wu Xi 16)
HT: 1-1

Dec 28 - Doha, Qatar
Palestine 0
Iraq 1 (Tariq 47)
HT: 0-0

Dec 28 - Dubai
United Arab Emirates 0
Kuwait 2 (Al Mutawa 45, Beitar 86)
HT: 0-1

Saturday, December 29
Dec 29 - Isa Town
Bahrain 4 (Al Romaihi 9, Juma 35, Rashid 65, Al Aswad 66)
North Korea 0
HT: 2-0

Sunday, December 30
Dec 30 - Dubai, UAE
Oman 0
Australia 5 (Nabbout 10, Ikonomidis 14, Mabil 24, Degenek 58, Irvine 89)
HT: 0-3

Dec 30 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Yemen 0
Syria 1 (Khribin 68)
HT: 0-0

Monday, December 31
Dec 31 - Doha, Qatar
Palestine 1 (Islame pen 75)
Kyrgyzstan 2
HT: 0-1

Dec 31 - Doha, Qatar
Philippines 2
Vietnam 4 (Nguyen Quang Hai 33, Phan Van Duc 35, Doan Van Hau 65, Que Ngoc Hai 75)

Dec 31 - Doha
Qatar 1 (Al Haidos pen 43)
Iran 2 (Taremi 17, Azmoun 47)
HT: 1-1

Dec 31 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
South Korea 0
Saudi Arabia 0

Wednesday, January 2
Jan 2 - Abu Dhabi, UAE
Oman 2 (Mubarak pen 25, Mohsin Al Ghassani 55)
Thailand 0
HT: 1-0

Tuesday, January 8
Jan 8 - Doha, Qatar
Sweden 0
Finland 1 (Markkanen 22)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 326. **Ref:** Al Marri (Qat)
Sweden: Rinne - J Andersson, Milosevic, Jansson, J Augustinsson (A Andersson 63), Aiesh, Tibbling (Thern 28), Fransson, Irandust, Holmberg (Gyokeres 63), Jeremejeff.
Finland: Joronen - Granlund (Ivanov 85), Toivio, Ojala, Pirinen, Skrabb (Taylor 54), Schuller (Kairinen 54), Sparv (Dahlstrom 46), Lappalainen (Ylatupa 68), Markkanen (Vayrynen 68), Karjalainen.

Friday, January 11
Jan11 - Doha, Qatar
Finland 1 (Karjalainen 81)
Estonia 2 (Kams 35, Anier 62)
HT: 0-1. **Ref:** Al Shaqsi (Oma)
Finland: Viitala - Toivio, Vayrynen (Karjalainen 60), Sparv (Kairinen 60), Ojala (Granlund 67), Skrabb (Lappalainen 46), Taylor, Ivanov, Hamalainen (Pirinen 84), Ylatupa, Dahlstrom (Markkanen 76).
Estonia: Lepmets - Kams, Purg, Elhi, Teniste, Peetson (Dmitrijev 46), Vihmann, Lepistu (Poom 46), Anier (Koskor 74), Liivak (Roosnupp 46), Kirss (Puri 60).

Jan11 - Doha, Qatar
Sweden 2 (Gyokeres 47, Thern 66)
Iceland 2 (Karlsson 6, Thorsteinsson 90+3)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 187. **Ref:** Al Shammari (Qat)
Sweden: Linner (Pettersson 46) - A Andersson, Papagiannopoulos, Dagerstal, J Andersson, Levi (Irandust 78), Thern, Hallberg (Milosevic 86), Tekie (Fransson 64), Gyokeres, Tankovic (Holmberg 78).
Iceland: Schram - Saevarsson, Bodvarsson, Karlsson, Hermannsson, Fridjonsson, Sigurbjornsson (Andresson 70), E Jonsson (Hilmar Halldorsson 67), A Bjarnason (Thorsteinsson 57), Smarason (Thrandarson 67), Thorarinsson (Finnsson 78).

KEY TO TABLES
(C) = champions; (R) = relegated;
(Q) = qualified for next stage

February 2019 Vol 59 No 6

EDITOR Gavin Hamilton
ASSISTANT EDITOR Nich Hills
DESIGN DIRECTOR Kevin Eason
DESIGN EDITOR Jamie Latchford
DEPUTY DESIGN EDITOR Daniel Franklin
PICTURE EDITOR Duncan Bond

PICTURES
Pictures copyright: Getty Images, Press Association Images

Thanks this issue to
Peter Neish

EDITORIAL
Pinehurst 2, Pinehurst Road, Farnborough Business Park, Farnborough, Hants GU14 7BF
Email: world_soccer@ti-media.com
General enquries: +44 (0) 1252 555213

ADVERTISING AND SPONSORSHIP
Matthew Johnston
Tel: +44 (0) 1252 555367
Email: matthew.johnston@ti-media.com

PRODUCTION MANAGER Nigel Davies
PUBLISHING DIRECTOR Gareth Beesley
GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR Andrea Davies

International licensing enquiries
+44 (0) 20 314 85490
Email: bianca.hamilton-foster@ti-media.com

TI Media

SUBSCRIPTIONS ORDER HOTLINE
+44 (0)333 333 1113
Lines open Mon-Sat, 8am-6pm, UK time
US toll free: 1 888 313 5528
Lines open Mon-Sat 7am-12 Mid Central Time
or visit magazinesdirect.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS RATES
Annual sub is for 12 months (13 issues, prices include postage) UK: £68.15 Europe/Eire (inc. VAT): 98.85 euros (airmail) USA: $144.48 (airmail) Rest of world: £99.25 (airmail)

Periodicals paid at Rahway, NJ Postmaster: send address changes to *World Soccer*, c/o MAIL America, 365 Blair Road, Avenel NJ 07001, USA. USPS004075

SUBSCRIPTIONS DEPARTMENT
WORLD SOCCER SUBSCRIPTIONS
PO Box 20501, 1001 NM Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel: +44 (0) 330 333 1113

WorldSoccer is a member of ESM EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

● A Bola (Portugal) ● De Telegraaf (Holland) ● ElfVoetbal (Holland) ● Fanatik (Turkey) ● Frankfurter Allgemeine (Germany) ● La Gazzetta dello Sport (Italy) ● Kicker (Germany) ● Marca (Spain) ● Nemzeti Sport (Hungary) ● Sport-Express (Russia) ● Sport/Foot (Belgium) ● TIPS Bladet (Denmark) ● World Soccer (UK)

ipso. Regulated

ESM XI

EUROPEAN SPORTS MEDIA

DECEMBER 2018

HOW IT WORKS Every month, journalists from each member of the European Sports Media group select their first XI based on the best individual performances from Europe's top competitions. For details of how each ESM member voted, visit worldsoccer.com/esm11

SEASON RANKINGS

Cumulative votes through the season

GOALKEEPERS

ALISSON (Liverpool)	9
Jan OBLAK (Atletico Madrid)	8
Marc-Andre TER STEGEN (Barcelona)	8
EDERSON (Manchester City)	7
Wojciech SZCZESNY (Juventus)	5
Thibaut COURTOIS (Real Madrid)	4
Roman BURKI (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Petr CECH (Arsenal)	1
David DE GEA (Manchester United)	1
Ralf FAHRMANN (Schalke)	1
Hugo LLORIS (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Mike MAIGNAN (Lille)	1
Jordi MASIP (Real Valladolid)	1
NETO (Valencia)	1
Oier OLAZABAL (Levante)	1
Rui PATRICIO (Wolverhampton Wanderers)	1
Jordan PICKFORD (Everton)	1

DEFENDERS

Virgil VAN DIJK (Liverpool)	32
Leonardo BONUCCI (Juventus)	14
Giorgio CHIELLINI (Juventus)	12
Jordi ALBA (Barcelona)	9
ALEX SANDRO (Juventus)	9
Joao CANCELO (Juventus)	9
MARQUINHOS (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
Gerard PIQUE (Barcelona)	8
Ashraf HAKIMI (Borussia Dortmund)	7
Joshua KIMMICH (Bayern Munich)	7
Thomas MEUNIER (Paris Saint-Germain)	7
Lukasz PISZCZEK (Borussia Dortmund)	6
Kalidou KOULIBALY (Napoli)	5
Aymeric LAPORTE (Manchester City)	5
Andrew ROBERTSON (Liverpool)	5
Marcos ALONSO (Chelsea)	4
Juan BERNAT (Paris Saint-Germain)	4
Sergio RAMOS (Real Madrid)	4
Manuel AKANJI (Borussia Dortmund)	3
Trent ALEXANDER-ARNOLD (Liverpool)	3
Milan SKRINIAR (Internazionale)	3
Kyle WALKER (Manchester City)	3
DAVID LUIZ (Chelsea)	2
Matthijs DE LIGT (Ajax)	2
Joe GOMEZ (Liverpool)	2
Lucas HERNANDEZ (Atletico Madrid)	2
Vincent KOMPANY (Manchester City)	2
MARCELO (Real Madrid)	2
David ALABA (Bayern Munich)	1
Daley BLIND (Ajax)	1
Dani CARVAJAL (Real Madrid)	1
Abdou DIALO (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Junior FIRPO (Real Betis)	1
Makoto HASEBE (Eintracht Frankfurt)	1
Mats HUMMELS (Bayern Munich)	1
Thilo KEHRER (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Dejan LOVREN (Liverpool)	1
Benjamin MENDY (Manchester City)	1
Ferland MENDY (Lyon)	1
Nicolas OTAMENDI (Manchester City)	1
Sokratis PAPASTATHOPOULOS (Arsenal)	1
Benjamin PAVARD (Stuttgart)	1
Sergi ROBERTO (Barcelona)	1
Nico SCHULZ (Hoffenheim)	1
Nelson SEMEDO (Barcelona)	1
Thiago SILVA (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Nicolas TAGLIAFICO (Ajax)	1
Alex TELLES (Porto)	1
Omer TOPRAK (Borussia Dortmund)	1
Kieran TRIPPIER (Tottenham Hotspur)	1

MIDFIELDERS

Eden HAZARD (Chelsea)	21
Marco REUS (Borussia Dortmund)	17
David SILVA (Manchester City)	12
Axel WITSEL (Borussia Dortmund)	10
Jadon SANCHO (Borussia Dortmund)	8
N'Golo KANTE (Chelsea)	6
Philippe COUTINHO (Barcelona)	5
JORGINHO (Chelsea)	5
Paul POGBA (Manchester United)	5
Leroy SANE (Manchester City)	5
FERNANDINHO (Manchester City)	4
Miralem PJANIC (Juventus)	4
Bernardo SILVA (Manchester City)	4
Christian ERIKSEN (Tottenham Hotspur)	3
Thorgan HAZARD (Borussia M'gladbach)	3
Pablo SARABIA (Sevilla)	3
ARTHUR (Barcelona)	2
Rodrigo BETANCUR (Juventus)	2
Thomas DELANEY (Borussia Dortmund)	2
ISCO (Real Madrid)	2
Blaise MATUIDI (Juventus)	2
James MILNER (Liverpool)	2
Nicolas PEPE (Lille)	2
SAUL Niguez (Atletico Madrid)	2
Cengiz UNDER (Roma)	2
Ever BANEGA (Sevilla)	1
Ross BARKLEY (Chelsea)	1
Sergio BUSQUETS (Barcelona)	1
Kevin DE BRUYNE (Manchester City)	1
Memphis DEPAY (Lyon)	1
Angel DI MARIA (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Javairo DILROSUN (Hertha Berlin)	1
Julian DRAXLER (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Ondrej DUDA (Hertha Berlin)	1
FABINHO (Liverpool)	1
Bruno FERNANDES (Sporting)	1
Andre GOMES (Everton)	1
Leon GORETZKA (Bayern Munich)	1
Ilkay GUNDOGAN (Mancheser City)	1
Franck KESSIE (Milan)	1
Sami KHEDIRA (Juventus)	1
Giovani LO CELSO (Real Betis)	1
Riyad MAHREZ (Manchester City)	1
Sergej MILINKOVIC-SAVIC (Lazio)	1
Luka MODRIC (Real Madrid)	1
Jesus NAVAS (Sevilla)	1
Matteo POLITANO (Internazionale)	1
Ivan RAKITIC (Barcelona)	1
RODRI (Valencia)	1
SON Heung-min (Tottenham Hotspur)	1
Lucas TORREIRA (Arsenal)	1
Oliver TORRES (Porto)	1
Marco VERRATTI (Paris Saint-Germain)	1
Georginio WIJNALDUM (Liverpool)	1
WILLIAN (Chelsea)	1

FORWARDS

Lionel MESSI (Barcelona)	26
Cristiano RONALDO (Juventus)	15
Paco ALCACER (Borussia Dortmund)	11
Mohamed SALAH (Liverpool)	11
Kylian MBAPPE (Paris Saint-Germain)	10
Krzysztof PIATEK (Genoa)	10
NEYMAR (Paris Saint-Germain)	8
Andre SILVA (Sevilla)	8
Luis SUAREZ (Barcelona)	7
Pierre-Emerick AUBAMEYANG (Arsenal)	6
Mauro ICARDI (Internazionale)	6
Raheem STERLING (Manchester City)	5
Sergio AGUERO (Manchester City)	4
Harry KANE (Tottenham Hotrspur)	4
Ousmane DEMBELE (Barcelona)	3
Dries MERTENS (Napoli)	3
Roberto FIRMINO (Liverpool)	2
Lorenzo INSIGNE (Napoli)	2
Duvan ZAPATA (Atalanta)	2
Hakim ZIYECH (Ajax)	2
Gareth BALE (Real Madrid)	1
Sebastien HALLER (Eintracht Frankfurt)	1
Borja IGLESIAS (Espanyol)	1
Luka JOVIC (Eintracht Frankfurt)	1
Robert LEWANDOWSKI (Bayern Munich)	1
Fabio QUAGLIARELLA (Sampdoria)	1
Cristhian STUANI (Girona)	1

Latest...East Bengal (in orange) won December's fixture 3-2 to increase their overall derby advantage to 128 victories, 118 defeats and 120 draws

EAST BENGAL v MOHUN BAGAN

Regularly watched by six-figure crowds, the Kolkata Derby is now almost 100 years old

For many years the two biggest teams in India were seen as representative of a specific class of citizen, with Mohun Bagan the team of the city's "native" Bengali population, while those with "immigrant" Bangladeshi origins supported East Bengal.

Today, those divisions are not so clear cut and both sides draw support from far and wide, with many players having swapped one allegiance for the other. Unfortunately, however, feelings can still run extremely high at times and in August 1980 a particularly volatile derby game ended with a riot at the Eden Gardens stadium during which 16 fans were killed.

Founded in 1889, Mohun Bagan are the country's oldest football club and enjoyed great success. In 1911, with a team playing in bare feet, they beat the East Yorkshire Regiment to become the first Indian winners of the IFA Shield and the result – which is celebrated every July 29 as Mohun Bagan Day – was seen as a landmark victory in India's struggle for independence from Britain.

In 1920, much to the annoyance of the club's vice-president, Suresh Chandra Chaudhuri, Mohun Bagan's coaching staff refused to pick defender Sailesh Bose for a cup game. With no reason provided for the player's exclusion, Chaudhuri left the club and formed East Bengal.

While East Bengal last won the national league in 2004, Mohun Bagan's most recent success was in 2015 and they currently lead their great rivals with four titles to three. WS

Hero...Baichung Bhutia is considered India's greatest player of all time

ON BOTH SIDES

SUBHASH BHOWMICK
● 1969-70, 1973-76, 1978-79; (coach) 1999-2000, 2002-05, 2008-09
● 1970-73, 1976-78; (coach) 2010-11

CHIMA OKORIE
● 1987-90
● 1991-93, 1997-99

BHAICHUNG BHUTIA
● 1993-95, 1997-99, 2003-06, 2009-11, 2015
● 2002-03, 2006-09

SUNIL CHHETRI
● 2002-05, 2011-12
● 2008-09

CLASSIC ENCOUNTERS

1921 Aug 8
The first meeting, in the semi-finals of the Cooch Behar Cup, ended in a goalless draw, with Mohun Bagan winning the replay 3-1.

1975 Sep 29
A record scoreline for the fixture, East Bengal's 5-0 thrashing of their great rivals secured a fifth consecutive IFA Shield and legend has it that several Mohun Bagan players were so scared of repercussions from their angry fans that they spent that night hiding on a boat on the Ganges.

1997 Jul 13
Over 131,000 fans – a record for a sporting event in India – saw Baichung Bhutia get a hat-trick as East Bengal won 4-1 in the Federation Cup semi-finals.

2012 Dec 9
Mohun Bagan's Syed Rahim Nabi was hospitalised after being hit in the face by a brick thrown from the stands during an I-League clash. Forty spectators and 20 policemen were also injured and the game was abandoned.

Hurt...Nabi

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE FEBRUARY 22

"Art of Football bring out
the beauty in the game's most
memorable moments" Copa90

"Art of Football capture classic
moments in a vibrant,
contemporary style" The Guardian

"Art of Football get it.
those split-second moments
are treasured memories and their
artwork captures them in a
classy and stylish way" Ball Street

"Art of Football's shirts capture
the vibrancy of the game
like no other" Dirty Tackle

"Art of Football - where the
beautiful game comes to life"
Hitesh Ratna, Editor, FourFourTwo

"The Art of Football team create
truly unique and authentic content
that is designed to emotionally connect
real fans to the biggest moments
in the game" Adidas Uk

Art-of-football.com